THE RATIONAL PATH

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by

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CHAPTER I

Lao Tzu

Individual pride is the trait least known throughout the entire yellow race, and appears, to the eyes of the Chinese who observe it in other races, the most incomprehensible. Respect for the dead ancestors to whom one is connected, and solidarity with the living, who are all parts of one great social being, keep the Chinese from any desire for individual distinction. Such is the traditional teaching, from which no mind escapes, and whose imprint is borne by everyone, all the stronger and more pronounced the more one has worked, and the more the study of the ancestral intellectual heritage has made one learned. Collective pride in one's race is a commendable pride, but the individual's particular pride is a ridiculous and reprehensible vanity. Thus, in the philosophical caste, which is like the head of this great body of scholars, one strives less to be the bold inventor of new concepts than the pious son and incorruptible guardian of the original and traditional concept.

As we shall see later, this mindset, which is as obligatory as a rite to such an extent that any contrary inclination would seem criminal and sacrilegious, means that all philosophical systems, whatever branch of general philosophy may be in question, are derived from the first philosophical system ever expressed, that is to say, the *Yijing* of Fohi and Wenwang, which we have studied and summarised in The *Metaphysical Way*[1] .

But, moreover, this mindset means that all the great philosophers, all the founders of schools of thought, rather than setting themselves up as pioneers and striving to stand out, modestly declare themselves to be the 'younger brothers' of the great masters of the past, and the respectful continuators of their teachings.

Thus, instead of claiming to bring a new doctrine—one that takes root by criticising the old ones amidst turmoil and negation—they declare themselves to be bringing an adaptation suited to the times, and guard against the slightest innovation. This is why, in accordance with the spirit of the most ancient dogmas, they all appear as *successive intellectual incarnations* of a single doctrine, which, having never varied since the beginning of time, is quite simply and naturally the Truth.

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[1] Paris, *Éditions Traditionnelles*, 1936.

The modesty of such an attitude, such a lack of pretension, is reflected in the daily lives and social roles of philosophers. Generally speaking, they are mere agents of a governmental and administrative state, outside of which they have established their theories and speculations; they live and die quietly and simply, in a calculated distance from the clamour, honours and tragedies; and their existence is so peaceful, so in keeping with the average existence of men of their time, so devoid of splendour and special circumstances, that their biography fits into ten lines, and that the glory which immortalises their writings forgets their person.

But the few rare and willing disciples whom these philosophers drew to their side—and who were all the more ardent and convinced because no proselytising or grandstanding had attracted them—the few disciples who survive the Master are not content merely to jealously guard a doctrine that became sacred from the very day the one who taught it passed away; they, too, obey that personal modesty and respect for the past in which all the yellow generations excel.

And, by every possible means, they exalt this Master, who was modest and silent whilst he was present, but who, upon his death, became for them the Past, and the finest monument to the Past, since they heard him and loved him. Through their efforts, he leaps abruptly from obscurity to the pinnacle, and his person is surrounded by the light and glory that his ideas deserved.

And so, alongside the precise and monotonous biography, and immediately following it, the legend rises up—dazzling, golden, wonderful, divine, in the glittering fabric of which the enlightened disciples set, like so many black pearls, the *symbols* or paraphrases of the important events in the Master's life (important, of course, solely in terms of the philosophical doctrine, all other contingencies having vanished).

No philosopher, no great mind of the Race escapes this custom, which has become like an ethnic law; Laozi no more than the others. And that is why we present here his life, as it is officially and actually recorded in the Chronology of the Empire, and we follow this biography—brief and seemingly indifferent—with the legend that the imagination and gratitude of generations wove around the departed Master.

'Laozi was born on the^{14th}day of the^{7th}month of the^{3rd}year of Emperor Tingwang of the Zhou dynasty, that is to say, during the^{54th}year of the^{34th}cycle [2] . He was originally from the village of Khio-jin, in the commune of Laï, district of Khoukien, or Khouyang, in the kingdom of Tshou[3] . His family name was Li; his given name, Eul; his honorific name, Peyang; his posthumous name, Tan. Laozi is the nickname given to him by his disciples[4] . He held the post of keeper of the archives. He strove to live in seclusion and to remain unknown. He served for a long time under the

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[2] That is, 604 BC.

[3] Corresponding to the province of Kuei-fu, in the Viceroyalty of Honan, at 34° latitude and 0°54' west longitude Beijing.

[4] Laotseu = the old doctor.

Tcheou; seeing it fall into decline, he resigned his post and withdrew to the far reaches of the kingdom, to the Hankouflouan Pass, whose chief was a certain Inhi[5] . There, for the instruction of Inhi, he composed a book on the Way and Virtue, comprising just under six thousand characters. After which he departed. It is not known where or how he spent his final days. Laozi was a sage who loved obscurity.

Thus speaks the *Sseki*, the official chronicle of the Empire compiled by the chief historian of Emperor Wuti of the Han dynasty, the famous Sse-ma-thiên (104 BC).

Only five generations of Laozi's family are known. His son, named Tsong, was a general under the viceroy of Wei; Tsong's son was Chou; Chou's son was Kong; Kong's son was Hia, whom Emperor Xiaowen of the Han dynasty summoned to court (179 BC). Hia had a son, Kiaï, who was minister to the viceroy Khiang of Kiaosi. After that, Laozi's descendants disappear from the records.

Laozi was seventy years old when he began his book on the *Tao*; he had twelve disciples, most of whom were merely intellectual disciples, did not know him personally, and lived 100 to 150 years after his death; the most famous among them is the philosopher Sichoeï.

The extreme simplicity of this biography cannot be surpassed; it was composed three and a half centuries after Laozi's presumed death. It contains all that is known for certain about the philosopher's life. It would have been just as easy to surround his birth, life and death with extraordinary phenomena as it was to do so for the Buddha, for Moses, for Elijah, and for so many others. A legend has indeed grown up around Laozi; but even in China itself, one is advised not to believe it, and to regard it merely as a collection of symbols that are somewhat too striking. And the original account we have just given stands alongside and above the fable, invented to serve the psychological needs we identified earlier.

It is entirely permissible to believe that Laozi, after passing through the gate of Hankou, travelled to Persia and Bactria, and, according to a fairly well-established local tradition, ended his life in solitude on the Tibetan plateaus. But it is not useful, even if this were possible, to clarify this supposition. For it must be borne in mind that the *Tao* and the *Te* (the Way and the Virtue), the only books emanating directly from Laozi himself, were written before he left the Empire, and without his ever having left it.

Laozi's philosophical system – and this is what it is important to establish – is therefore inspired neither by Buddhism, nor by Lamaism, nor even by Christianity, as certain zealous missionaries claimed, and, after them, the excellent Mr Abel Rémusat, a member of the Institute. Laozi's teaching stems solely from the primordial tradition, piously preserved by the Yellow People, and whose most accurate expression is the *I Ching*. Such is the truth. We may now turn our attention to the legend.

The legend of Laozi is the work of a certain mythologist named Kohong, who lived around 350 BC and wrote a history entitled **Chin-tsien-tchouen**

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[5] Hankou Pass, Lingpao district: 30°42' N and 108°18' E

of the Gods and Immortals. This history is quite similar to the 'Lives of the Saints' in Christian hagiography. Here is a summary of the wonders with which Kohong surrounds the hidden and obscure existence of Laozi: 'Laozi's mother became pregnant as a result of the emotion she felt upon seeing a shooting star; it was from heaven that he had received the breath of life; moreover, the sages say that he was born with heaven and earth, and that he had received a pure soul emanating from heaven. His mother carried him in her womb for seventy-two years; at birth, he had white hair, which is why he was called Laozi. His mother, then, conceived him without the aid of a husband, and he was able to speak from the moment of his birth. He had a white and yellow complexion, beautiful eyebrows, long ears, deep-set eyes, widely spaced teeth and thick lips. A broad ridge ran across his forehead; the top of his head had a pronounced protrusion; his nose was supported by a double bony arch. From the moment of his birth, he was endowed with divine insight; the life with which heaven animated him was unlike that of ordinary men. He composed nine hundred and thirty treatises to teach how to live. They deal with the nine ambrosias, the eight marvellous stones, the golden wine, the jade juice, the means of preserving one's original purity, of maintaining unity, of conserving one's strength, of purifying one's body, of dispelling calamities, of subduing demons, of triumphing over evils, of conquering through the power of magic, and of bringing malevolent spirits to heel. He also wrote on talismans. – He lived for over three hundred years, and for nearly two centuries had in his service a disciple named Siou-Kia, to whom he had imparted, as he later did to the mandarin Inhi, the secret of immortality.

Kohong's eulogy continues at length in this strange, rambling, and indeed very often contradictory tone. And it would be quite pointless to follow him any further in these little tales suited to the imagination of the masses and the credulity of children. Despite certain passages where, through the crudeness of the text and the figures (cf. the age of Laozi's 'birth' compared with the time of the *Tao's* publication, and also what is said of the secret of immortality), one can see quite clearly what metaphysical and social mysteries are being symbolised, it is by no means certain that Laozi's friends and successors ever showed much gratitude to the clumsy sycophant. Moreover, and as if China were the country where, despite everything, common sense and reason ultimately prevail over human ignorance and conceit, the excellent Kohong himself concludes his marvellous jumble with the following statement: 'Doctors of a narrow mind[6] wish to portray Laozi as a divine and extraordinary being, and urge future generations to follow him; but, by doing so, they prevent them from believing that the secret of immortality can be acquired through study. For if Laozi is merely a sage who attained the Tao, men must strive to emulate his example; but if he is said to be an extraordinary being endowed with a divine essence, it is impossible to emulate him."

What, then, are we to make of Laozi as a person? Perhaps this is where we should apply the famous principle of *the I Ching* to the founder of Taoist doctrine, which

[6] And it should be noted that Kohong is not speaking of himself at all here.

distinguishes, with such marked and clear features, personality from individuality. And it would be permissible to claim, with all the caution that the smiling indifference of the Yellow scholars always maintains in such cases, that the 'personality' which Laozi embodied on this earth was precisely one of those strange, superhuman personalities which appear, in the course of history, precisely at the turning points of Destiny, when it seems that Creation needs supernatural aid and an unexpected impetus in the direction of its evolution; and, in this case, the Taoist thesis would coincide with the Muslim thesis, and also with the Gnostic thesis of the early ages of Christianity[7] . But we are not here in the realm of the dreams of the peoples of Asia Minor, nor of Western sentimentality. What distinguishes the Yellow Tradition from all other systems conceived and forged by human thought is its extreme simplicity, devoid of any mythical fabrication, and its perfect homogeneity in the interweaving of all its logical principles. This characteristic, which sets the Yellow Tradition apart, maintains its uniqueness only if it is preserved in its entirety. And it would be a bizarre contradiction to claim to elevate one of the greatest masters—indeed, the greatest master of Eastern thought—by applying to him methods of glorification which he himself did not desire for his work or that of his Ancestors. Devoid of, and utterly disdainful of, any sort of the marvellous – which he ironically leaves to the fairground tricks of the *taosse* and pseudo-doctors – Laozi was born, lived and died as a man. His unshakeable simplicity, his haughty humility, bound him imperiously to the normality of his destiny; and he would have been ashamed to cast upon himself the slightest ray of that total splendour, which belonged solely to his doctrine. We do not claim that such conduct is an example easy to follow, nor one often followed by most reformers and saviours of the human race. But we must credit the Chinese philosopher with the original frankness of this attitude, recognising that, with the passing of the centuries, this self-effacing man takes on a beauty more complete and more certain than those who forced the general credulity by adorning themselves with the trappings of legend and divinity.

Laozi, then, knew that he was a man, and did not wish to be regarded as anything other than a man. But he also knew the transformative, initiatory and transcendent power that intellectual labour exerts upon man, in the constant and ardent pursuit of complete knowledge. He strove towards this transformation, and he attained it. When he recognised that he had attained it, he vanished. Thus he sought from science and from his own will the superhuman qualities which he refused to claim to have received, from birth, from the whim of God or the caprice of a god. And, to justify the admirable esoteric principle that, from one plane to another, extreme humility is transformed into extreme greatness, he owed the supreme gifts earned through his merit and virtue solely to himself, rather than claiming them to be innate and inherent to a particular mission. And here we find the naively encouraging thought of the good mythologist Kohong: what Lao Tzu did, any man may attempt to do; the goal that Lao Tzu attained is open to the goodwill of all men. For, in

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[7] The *Christos*, or 'Men Made Gods' of early Gnosticism.

Instead of descending to humanity by divine means, he ascended to divinity by human means. This is a special lesson to be gleaned from his obscure life, one that must be clarified and which one may attempt to put into practice.

As we have said, and as official history records with its customary dryness: when Laozi attained the state of knowledge, he withdrew from among his fellow men and spent the remainder of his life in the silence and complete solitude of a retreat unknown to all. It therefore appears that, from that moment on, he considered himself useless among the crowd. For he who has reached the summit of wisdom is no longer quite a man, and thus cannot be of benefit to other men. And it is here that we must make a little room for a summary of the historic meeting between Laozi and Confucius. We shall see there that ordinary wisdom can be acquired through propaganda and teaching, that he who professes it gains a great reputation in the world and among governments, but that this self-promotion is an insurmountable obstacle to his inner perfection and definitive asceticism; on the contrary, we shall see that total wisdom cannot be taught or disseminated, that it can only be acquired in isolation and through personal effort; that its adherents willingly remain unknown, and can thus devote the zeal and time they do not spend on dazzling the masses to their own evolution and the subsequent evolution of posterity.

The conversation between Laozi and Confucius is entirely historical: it is recounted, in terms that are identical throughout, by the most reliable Chinese writers of the two philosophers' era, and particularly by Sima Qian, the historian of the Celestial Empire:

'Confucius, having heard of Laozi, wished to find out for himself what sort of extraordinary man he was; he went to see him and questioned him about the essence of his teachings. Instead of answering him, Laozi reproached Khongtzeu, telling him that he was too well-known to the outside world; that his conduct smacked of pomp and vanity, *and that the large number of his disciples was more likely to foster pride in his heart than to inspire a love of wisdom*. 'The wise man,' he said to him, 'loves obscurity; far from aspiring to office, he shuns it. Convinced that, at the end of his life, a man leaves behind nothing but the good maxims he has taught to those capable of retaining and practising them, he does not give himself away to just anyone; he studies the times and circumstances. He who possesses a treasure hides it carefully, lest it be taken from him; he is careful not to proclaim everywhere that he has it at his disposal. He who is truly virtuous does not parade his virtue; he does not announce to everyone that he is wise. That is all I have to say to you; make good use of it. 'I have,' he added, 'heard it said that the rich man sends his friends away with substantial gifts, and that the wise man sends those who visit him away with some sound advice. I am not rich, but I humbly believe myself to be wise.'

This rather stern admonition, which Confucius received, moreover, with a patience and gratitude that do the greatest credit to his domestic virtues, profoundly indicates the almost savage reserve and dogmatic austerity to which Laozi had confined himself and from which he never strayed. We must bear this in mind in order to confound those chroniclers who are naive enough to pass off as followers of

Laozi, the doctors, jugglers and pseudo-doctors who practise miracle-working along the roads of the Empire, that Laozi does not wish to have many disciples, but only a few chosen friends, and that he condemns nothing so much as noisy proselytising and thoughtless propaganda. Teaching as Laozi intended it—restricted both in the number of those to whom it is given and in the portion of the doctrine that may be imparted—bears all the hallmarks of the sacred and occult teachings of India, Tibet, Egypt, and all the centres of mystery and initiation, where the rays of the Great Light were jealously preserved.

The end of this extraordinary and glorious man was in keeping with the solitude and dignity of his life. Now endowed, through his knowledge, his will, and the blessed results of his personal asceticism, with the greatest powers that a spirit clothed in a soul and bound to a body can possess here on earth, he recognised the futility of the selfish exercise of these powers; and, to put them to use, either for the common good through their application, or for the enrichment of the intellectual heritage of the wise through their preservation, he left his natural homeland and withdrew, unknown to all and lost forever, to one of those remote communities of Upper Tibet, which are the intellectual homeland of those who have ascended the highest rungs of knowledge. And there he began and completed a truly superhuman life, which he deliberately concealed from all and offered as an example to no one, because that example could be of no use to mankind.

He died up there, and no one knows where he lies buried, in those sanctuaries where the human remains that once temporarily housed the most sublime thoughts are mingled into an anonymous and indifferent heap. Thus he justified and pushed to its very limits his logical love of self-effacement. And, through a just and inevitable return, the doctrine left by this sage, in a book of brief and mysterious aphorisms, has governed, for more than two thousand years, all those of the yellow race who possess a reflective mind; and it is this doctrine which, at the time of future expansions, whether intellectual or material, will guide the societies of tomorrow towards a practical and better goal, and tip the scales where, set against the necessity of things and the contingent laws of the flow of forms, the legacy of human consciousness and will accumulates.

What Laozi's doctrine was in relation to external matters, what fate his teaching met, what influence he had on the affairs of the Empire and on the actions of the emperors—this is a point on which it would be all the better to pause for a moment, since it has been much discussed without anything being unravelled or understood, at least in the West. Scholars of the white race, and particularly European missionaries, have concerned themselves almost exclusively with the doctrines of Confucius—concrete, easily defined doctrines, whose continuous and practical applications constantly came into conflict with Christian propaganda.

The teachings of Laozi, encapsulated by their creator in a few general maxims, entrusted by Laozi to only two disciples—who subsequently trained ten more—and containing nothing but the most precise possible expression of traditional truths and immutable principles, were bound to exert only a hidden influence, since, by their very difficulty, the number of its followers could only ever be

limited. But this hidden and gradual influence was bound to be supreme and profound, because, disregarding material and immediate interests, it addressed that which is highest in man and, in reality, least human. This is why, as regards political affairs and the social economy, the influence of Laozi's school was rare; but, when it was exerted, it was forceful and all-encompassing.

From the simple account of the famous meeting between Laozi and Confucius, one can already see the difference in the minds of the two philosophers, the divergence—not of their fundamental ideas, but of the spheres in which they applied their ideas—and the undeniable superiority of Laozi, to which Confucius himself paid humble and wholehearted homage. Moving from the realm of pure ideas to that of practice, and leaving behind the spirit of cold and impeccable creators to enter the souls of proud and passionate disciples, the political and social implementation of the two systems—one of which should always have remained superior to the other—brought about many troubles and errors, during which the two schools distinguished themselves by the exaggeration of their fundamental qualities: the Confucians by their verbosity and timidity (excess of propaganda), and the Taoists by their energy and intransigence (excess of isolation). When presented to the public, Confucianism's first converts and apostles were the minor scholars: articulate, astute, eloquent, self-assured, and eager to play a role in the state or, failing that, in their village (scholars corresponding to this which the 20th century calls, in the West 'intellectuals' 'intellectuals'). These learned men, restless and popular, spread wise and amiable precepts amongst the people, from which they stood to gain personally.

Reserved for a carefully selected minority, Taoism found its adherents among the prudent, selfless, solitary and unassuming sages (whom the West calls 'thinkers' to distinguish them from intellectuals), who, by establishing higher laws and general principles without preaching or promoting them, cast no shadow; these sages brought their convictions among the scholars and high-ranking mandarins, from where they ascended to the imperial throne.

For a long time, the followers of the two doctrines fought; the Taoists forgetting that they were not made for struggle, the Confucians forgetting, despite the illustrious example of Confucius himself, that they were made to obey the Taoists, of whom they are but an emanation on a lower plane of mentality. The result was what always happens in societies weak enough to allow intellectuals and rhetoricians to impose themselves as masters and as predominant advisers, that is to say, an era of selfish and confused turmoil from which only the petty scholars stood to gain.

Paradoxical eloquence, amiable rhetoric, sentimentality, and all other means through which human ambition and selfishness take concrete form—in short, that instinctive and baseless intellectualism which later brought an end to the genius and very existence of Greece—was fortunately halted in China, in its piecemeal and destructive work. The Taoist emperors of the 2nd and 3rd centuries BCE may not have been motivated by such lofty reasons: they undoubtedly saw, in the distorted Confucian theories, the openly avowed desire to divide the empire into principalities and feudal states, to be distributed among the literati in proportion to the learning they had displayed and the volumes they had written; they saw, without

in Taoist doctrines the vigorous endorsement of the libertarian and communist system of the Chinese clan and family, upheld by a principle of sole authority emanating from heavenly authority, and giving concrete form on earth to the general traditional laws of cyclical evolution.

Guided by motives that were obviously not the noblest, these rulers nonetheless acted, dispelling erroneous interpretations and destroying writings of ambiguous appearance and intent, for the benefit of their race's happiness and the preservation of integral thought. Having heard this explanation, one must understand how they must have been reviled by their eloquent adversaries, and how the tenacity and persistent loquacity of petty scholars, over the twenty-two centuries of history that have elapsed since then, have succeeded in portraying these Taoist rulers as mere barbarians and as enemies of humanity's intellectual development. They were simply – and we must restore their true character – the enemies of the fragmentation of Doctrine and Power, and they would tolerate neither that enemies should lay hands on the sceptre, nor that babblers should lay hands on Knowledge, to disfigure it, tear it apart, and unduly appropriate its spoils.

Let us therefore restore the true image of the sovereign Tsinchihoangti, whom Confucius's false disciples and misguided interpreters took pleasure in calling the 'book-burner' and the 'persecutor of scholars'. This Taoist autocrat allowed those who thought to speak, and silenced those who spoke without thinking. This 'barbarian leader' had, however, appointed as his prime minister – and retained him until his death – the famous Lisse, a doctor and mandarin of the highest rank. And, before judging him on the unsubstantiated claims of the successors of those he persecuted, it would be wise to read in detail his famous edicts of proscription and book-burning.

The edict of proscription restricts punishment to those scholars who foment unrest and who seek to establish, within the empire, governments and feudal states of which they would be the leaders, against the emperor's consent. In reality, out of the several hundred thousand scholars of all ranks within the vast empire, precisely four hundred and eighty-seven were executed, and they had been caught in the very act of rebellion, themselves convicted of unrest and murder.

The edict of burning *exempted* from the emperor's severity *all* books on the teachings of Laozi, *all* books of the Primordial Tradition, *all* sacred and dogmatic books, *all* books not dealing with politics, and *all* books by Confucius himself, with the exception of *the Shujing*. All commentaries, all pamphlets, all paradoxical glosses, all pedantic, tendentious and analytical writings—which were nothing but mere gossip, and whose loss was felt only by those who wrote them—were burned. Moreover, there remains quite enough of the rest, and lovers of the quintessence have, since then, filled twenty times over the relative void created, in this useless and indigestible jumble, by the liberating edict of Tsinchihoangti. In truth, not a single thinker was troubled, not a single text was lost. Those who, under the guise of science and wit, were, within the intellectual and social edifice of the yellow race, elements of corruption, discord and dissociation, were disposed of—admittedly rather forcefully, perhaps—but then, who in the world is perfect?

What became of this Taoism, so cruelly upheld and so vigorously raised and maintained at the pinnacle? It remained, virtually, for two centuries, the imperial doctrine; then the edicts of proscription issued by Tsinchihoangti were revoked: this was a great blessing, for the freedom to write is almost as dear to man as the freedom to think, and certainly the ability to write independently and with impunity brought China some excellent works on morality and politics. But the rhetoricians reappeared and resumed their easy domination; and, as if the presence of these impotent intellectuals were bound to drive the sovereigns—who had allowed themselves to be swayed by such a pernicious and debilitating influence—to the lowest depths of degradation, their return to power coincided with the utterly scandalous entry into public affairs of the artificially impotent; and, whilst the Chinese soul was at the mercy of the windbags, the Chinese government fell into the hands of the eunuchs, and the concurrent introduction, into a race unprepared for it, of the sentimentalities of Buddhism – devoid of all that is superior in Buddhism and wonderfully suited to human evolution – plunged the country and the dynasty into the abyss. The Taoist sages, joined by the true Confucian philosophers, outraged by such a state of affairs, founded the secret societies, which still exist today among the yellow race (190 AD: the uprising of the Chang clan), and which were baptised in blood by the violent death of eighty thousand followers of Laozi.

Thus decided the eunuchs, the emperor whom the eunuchs inspired, and the false scholars who directed the eunuchs. We see that we are far removed from the 487 executions of the terrible Qin Shi Huangdi. The dynasty nonetheless collapsed under the combined efforts of the sages and the people: the Qin reigned, and Taoism blossomed into its finest form, the *Wuwei Jiao*, or ‘Society of the Great Void’, which regarded the honours and affections of the world as vain and unworthy of the immortal man, and which brought together an admirable constellation of Stoics.

From that time onwards, and following the turbulent period when four parallel dynasties ruled over a China divided into four kingdoms, the rulers and their councils realised that the teachings of Laozi and those of Confucius—which complement the former—should be taught side by side. The high mandarins remained attached, each in their own way, to the ‘doctrine of the Supreme Reason’, and they bestowed upon Confucius and his doctrine the official, public and numerous honours befitting a concrete, accessible science, beneficial to all, popular and respectable. And, throughout the Tang dynasty, the doctrine and even the outward worship of Laozi (for whom Emperor Gaozong built a temple on Mount Aries) were the doctrine and worship of the sages and the great (600 to 905 AD).

This conception perfectly corresponded to the universal principle that integral science – or what we suppose to be such – should be communicated only to a select few, whilst the masses should benefit solely from the happy consequences and earthly benefits that the adepts of science know how to derive from it. There is no doubt that the thoughtless dissemination of inner Taoist teaching would have been useless and even pernicious, in that it would have led the intellectually deficient – who everywhere form the majority and are the social scourge of peoples – to anarchic sentiments

that are entirely at odds with the doctrine of Laozi. There is no greater danger than to present knowledge without veils: just as the sun dazzles and blinds the feeble eyes of humanity, so total science stuns the average mind; and, if they seek to approach it, they fall, in their mental blindness, into the deepest abysses, which they mistake, in their naive vanity, for the immeasurable depth of Truth. Laozi had grasped very well that the peril is never greater than when the doctrine is most comprehensive, and the race most inquisitive. That is why he himself considered his teaching too delicate for the multitude of petty yellow scholars, and that is why he refused to engage in propaganda or missionary work. His successors were not always so well-advised; but it must be said, in their defence, that they were often driven towards impetuous proselytism by the inertia of the sovereigns and the failings of the imperial administration[8] .

Moreover, no praise should be spared for the dynasty that understood how the dogmas of Laozi and the ideas of Confucius were to be taught in parallel, the former to a select few, the latter to the masses, each to their specific and appropriate audience, and how the harmony of this dual teaching would bring both the light of wisdom to the intellectual elite and the fulfilment of happiness to the educated middle classes.

Laozi's doctrine welcomed without envy or fear the priests who spread throughout the Celestial Empire the doctrine of Fo (Indian Buddhism), the philosophy of nature (materialist Confucianism), primitive Lamaism (the teachings of Pa-sse-pa), and the cult of Tathsin (the religion of the Gui). These various forms, or distortions, of the single Tradition did not address the same intellectual plane as Taoism. Yet, whilst such propaganda was of little consequence, the same could not be said of the demise of the last Chinese dynasty and its violent replacement by a Mongol dynasty, whose first ruler was Kublai, grandson of Genghis Khan. This autocrat, who was a great conqueror and also a man of great experience and worldly wisdom, realised that the Taoist doctrine, firmly rooted in the minds of the sages and spiritual masters of the race, would be the great obstacle to the new domination, and, from 1280 to 1286, he set about eradicating all schools and books of Taoism, with the exception of the writings of Laozi himself; his calculation proved sound, for he thereby secured the submission of the people and the resignation of their leaders.

What is imposed by force is never lasting, and disappears when that force is exhausted; the hieratic autocracy which, under the Mongol dynasty, primitive Lamaism imposed not only on China but on all the territories under Mongol rule[9] , wearied the Chinese people and led, after an era that was not without glory, to the decline and oblivion of the Mongol dynasty. The dynasty

[8] It is to this period that the famous Siganfu inscription dates, which was not discovered until a thousand years later (1626), and in which zealous missionaries believed they saw an allusion to Christianity, whilst, by the admission of other, more enlightened missionaries, it is a concise ode in honour of Laozi.

[9] These included Persia, Assyria and Muscovy, which were governed, in the name of Kublai, by the famous viceroy Arghun, who maintained official correspondence with Philip the Fair, King of France.

The Ming dynasty succeeded him, and immediately Taoism resumed, on the steps of the throne and in the councils of the empire, the discreet, unnoticed yet all-powerful position, the only one that suited it. During the two hundred and fifty years of this truly national period of its history, China knew nothing but prolonged prosperity (1368–1616). And, despite what the European missionaries said, Taoism was the benevolent guide and the secret inspiration behind what was perhaps the finest dynasty ever to have reigned on earth[10] . At the fall of the Ming dynasty, there were, throughout China, 272 imperial libraries, well-organised, well-stocked and much frequented, 90,000 scholars who had attained the highest academic ranks, and 13,600 literati officials. The Manchu Tartars, successive victors over the Chinese armies, then established the Qing dynasty, currently reigning, which, whilst not allowing the disciples of Laozi to retain their dominant influence, maintained them in their dignities and honours.

The introduction, during this dynasty, and especially under the famous reign of Kangxi, of Christian propaganda did not alter the state of affairs any more, from the point of view of traditional doctrines, than had the various proselytising movements we have already enumerated. And when, neglecting to imitate Buddhism, which knew how to adapt to traditions, Christianity attempted to oppose the intellectual heritage of Laozi and Kongzi, it was crushed by such a unanimous agreement between the sovereign and the people that there is no need to revisit this matter in the future, and that the Christian religion will never be, in the Yellow World, be anything more than a subject of curiosity for a few idle scholars, a refuge for a few repeat offenders against the laws of their native land, and a means of political penetration, more or less skilful depending on the calibre of the diplomats who employ it.

Having lost their former power, and recognising, like their ancestors, that the yellow race is the only one capable of benefiting from their teachings, the disciples of Laozi—exiled from the court and from public office since the reign of Kiaking—have devoted all their energy to the creation of secret societies, whose significance, powerful and hidden role, and future aims we shall examine in due course. It is from *the 'Heavenly* Reason' that all the great movements have emerged which, by keeping the Chinese soul on the traditional Path, show it its future duty. It is this Way – the *Rational Way* – which, having maintained the Chinese race in a blissful and then possible state of immobility, independent and separated from other human races by distance and by the antinomy of civilisations, it is this Way which, for the same profound reasons, will guide the race towards the active progress demanded by the (now unavoidable) proximity of other ethnographic entities, in order to maintain for this race the perpetual supremacy deserved by the ancient elevation of its doctrine, the beauty of its practical morality and the innumerable multitude of its children.

[10] It is at this time (1395) that we must date the emergence of the *Taosse*, a sect crudely modelled on Taoism, where thaumaturgy and pseudo-miracles, held in high esteem, served as a means of livelihood for a thousand false priests, whose audacity went so far as to offer Emperor Hungwou himself the so-called 'elixir of immortality'.

CHAPTER II

Taoist Concordances

Laozi's doctrine is a form of early Christianity, says the Orientalist Pauthier. The author of *the Essay on Hindu Philosophy*, for his part, declares that the great reform of Brahmanism, propagated by the Buddha in India, had a profound impact in China, and was not unknown to Laozi, who found elements of it in the library of the kingdom of Zhou.

The commentator Su-Tong-po, renowned under the name Su-Tseu-Yeou, exiled to Yuntcheou amongst Samonian monks, draws from this the conviction that 'there is not a single proposition of Laozi that cannot be reconciled with the doctrine of the Buddha'.

On the other hand, a Christian missionary, Father Hue, portrays Laozi as 'a forerunner of the Essenes, of whom Jesus was the revealer' and of the philosophical Gnostics in the manner of Clement of Alexandria. Laozi is said to have been the one who carried on the teaching of the 'Zoroastrian' principle, which became a Christian principle in Europe, the first fruit of which was contemplative anchoritism; and this anchoritism, originating in India and China, is said to have persisted, remaining true to its roots yet gradually becoming westernised in Persia, Chaldea, Asia Minor, the Thebaid and throughout Europe.

More boldly, Montucci declares that: 'many passages of Laozi are so clear that anyone who has read this book cannot doubt that the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity was revealed to the Chinese more than five centuries before the coming of Jesus Christ'. Finally, Father Amyot believed he recognised even more clearly the names of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. And, to top it all off, Mr Abel Rémusat, a member of the Institute, who had worked hard but travelled little, and did not know how to speak Chinese, yet was translating its most difficult and abstruse works, recognised the name of Jehovah on page^{XIV}of *the Tao*. And he triumphantly adds: 'The trigrammatic word *i-hi-weï* (which Mr Rémusat has taken, syllable by syllable, from three different sentences on this page XIV) is materially identical to the tetragrammaton which, according to Diodorus of Sicily, the Jews gave to God as a sacred name. The most exact transcription of this famous name being found in a Chinese book is a most singular fact. I regard it as an indisputable sign of the path that Pythagorean or Platonic ideas followed to reach China."

Thus, Christians claim that Laozi was inspired by Christians; Buddhists, by Buddhists; Gnostics and Essenes, by the Therapeuts; and Catholics by the Jews, by Pythagoras and by Plato. Of course

, chronology is irrelevant to the matter, and official philology pays little heed, when speculating, to the most precise dates in history.

We see in this eagerness to dissect a man's intellectual legacy nothing but a solemn, universal and unexpected tribute to that man's intelligence; and very humbly, in an attempt to draw closer to the truth—which is certainly simpler and less astounding—we refer to Laozi's own unadorned admission: 'I merely teach what men have already taught before me' (*Tao*, p. 42).

We shall then recall that Laozi wrote his precepts in the kingdom of Zhou, and that it was before leaving China that he gave them the form in which we know them today. As for the rest, we refer those who love to daydream to the synoptic tables of universal history.

There are other commentators and translators of Laozi who, not content with having distorted his aphorisms through Western additions, and his very thought through the observations of certain Chinese rhetoricians and compilers (for China, like any other land, also produces this particular breed of scholars), insist that Laozi drew everything from his own resources. G. Pauthier, who is, however, the European who, to this day, has best grasped the spirit of the Master and his books, says that 'his doctrines are not bound to his country's past by any traditional link, by any historical precedent'. Mr Stanislas Julien also concurs with this view.

I believe, on reading the highly erudite, and above all highly intuitive, study that Pauthier devoted to Laozi, that by this he intended to pay the greatest of compliments to the philosopher he was commenting on. In this he was quite mistaken. When one says of a Chinese scholar that he has broken all traditional ties, one is directing the worst of insults at him, and, moreover, one is likely not to be telling the truth; for there is not a single Chinese person who can – even if he deserves it – attain glory unless he expressly traces his teaching back to that of his ancestors; so if there is a Chinese writer who has dared to do this, he is regarded in his own country as a strange madman; a conspiracy of silence is maintained around him; and so we know nothing of him, whether we have remained in Europe or even if we have attempted to go and discover the truth in China. Respect for one's ancestors and devotion to their ideas are the cornerstones of Chinese philosophy and scholarship, and no one would dream of building a system on any other foundations. Even in sociology, even in politics, today's Chinese reformers and revolutionaries – whom one might nevertheless suspect of having little enthusiasm for dusty and immutable antiquity – would not dream of presenting their reform projects as something new, for they would find no supporters there. On the contrary, they present them as a return to the old state of affairs, and a 'step back' to better times of the past; and, all things considered, if one cares to study the history of the ancient dynasties, one will see that these revolutionaries are not wrong, and that they know the past of their race as well as the soul of their contemporaries.

One must therefore be convinced that Laozi would never have become the educator of the Yellow Race had he not referred to the ancestors, and had he not spoken the simple truth when he repeated that he was merely teaching what had been taught before him. Those who read his books recognised in them, beneath new veils, the

Primordial Tradition: and thus they held Laozi in the highest esteem, placing him alongside the very first transmitters of that Primordial Tradition, which Laozi continued.

This is the *moral* proof of Laozi's traditionalism. There is also *historical* proof. It lies in the peaceful calm with which his doctrine was received. When a new cult or new ideas appear, they give rise to violent struggles between the bearers of the new fire and the guardians of the old fire. There is no example of one teaching succeeding another, whether in the religious or social sphere, without provoking resounding clashes that leave bloody traces throughout history. Thus, Christianity and Islam were born in the blood of their apostles and grew in the blood of their victims. And, within religions themselves, mere schisms have led to burnings at the stake, executions and massacres.

Let us turn to the history of China, that history so precise, so cold and so impartial, where the historian does not hesitate, if he deems it necessary, to condemn the very acts of the sovereign who pays him to record the events of his reign: we see nothing of the sort in the emergence of Taoism. Nor do we see anything of the sort in its triumphs or its setbacks[1] .

All the persecution it endured came at the hands of foreign invaders who sought to establish a new, conquering dynasty in China, which proves just how much Taoist teaching is, on the contrary, a traditional and national tradition. But there were no collective tortures, no exile or mass deportations, no temples set ablaze and destroyed; Taoism, from that border gate whose guardian, before crossing it for ever, Laozi entrusted his book to the gatekeeper, Taoism quietly made its way to the imperial throne, without a sound, without molesting or upsetting anyone, and, supremely, it took root in the Chinese soul, as if it had needed it precisely at that time, and as if it had long been prepared to receive it.

And, in truth, this preparation did exist: it existed because Taoist teaching was respectful of and consistent with tradition; for centuries upon centuries, this tradition had been the linchpin of knowledge; its rulings were the yardstick of conscience; its study was the mighty plough that ceaselessly tilled the mind; the brief and mysterious precepts of Taoism were the seeds fit to sprout in these furrows so widely opened, because they were precisely those for which the ploughing had been done, or rather because Laozi had sown them into the Chinese mind with the substance and the gesture that were fitting, that is to say, by wrapping them in traditional dogma and paying ritual homage to the Ancestors. That is why the harvest was swift and bountiful. And one may take this parable to its logical conclusion without fear of it faltering, and add that the soil was so fertile and so well prepared that, almost at the same time as the good seed, it had reserves of strength to make the weeds grow; that the jugglers appeared

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([1]) It is worth remembering that we have reduced the much-publicised executions in Tsinchi.

alongside the doctors, and the miracle-workers alongside the Sages, and that this weed grew so thick and so rampant that even today we still find it somewhat difficult to prevent it from diminishing and polluting the quality of the true harvest.

But it is in Laozi's doctrine itself that we find the manifestations of his intellectual connection to the tradition; it is in studying the *Way* and *Virtue* and the *Reactions* that his traditionalism shines through at every moment. And, before delving into the depths of the doctrine, we can provide proof that not only the Taoist system, but the very name of *the Tao* and its principle are drawn entirely from the finest source of Tradition [2] . Such will be the irrefutable *metaphysical* proof, which, without our laying much emphasis on it, and to top it all, will conclusively demonstrate that the sinologists of the 18th, and even those of the first two-thirds of the 19th century, had conceived nothing but theoretical dreams, and that the scientific and philosophical discoveries – which our colonial expansion in the Far East brought us – demolish everything one had believed one could profess *a priori*, without and beyond the documents. We therefore owe a new debt of gratitude to the explorers, travellers and colonists who, not content merely with having discovered, documented and enriched such parts of the Asian world, settled there to study the language, writing, books and people on the ground, and thus provided us with the broadest and most solid foundations for our learning and our reasoning. And, when one considers that, as a humble worker of my rank, I have been able to observe, during many years spent in the Far East, the difficulty of such tasks, one will not be surprised to see me place Francis Garnier, Luro and Philastre ahead of all the official and established scholars; for they were not content merely to be heroic, astute and patient Frenchmen, but at the same time, during their stay amongst the Yellow People, they were able to decipher the mysteries of their doctrines and penetrate the depths of their intellects.

We must refer to what we said, in a previous book, regarding the metaphysical conception of *Khien*, or the unmanifested Celestial Will[3]: *Khien* is the first hexagram of Fohi; it is the graphic representation of the Eternal Infinite; it is the foundation of the entire *I Ching*, the primordial rock upon which the entire tradition of the yellow races is built. In the science of numbers, it is zero. It is Being and Non-Being; that is to say, it is perfection, naturally possessing the power to generate (the principle of activity), yet generating nothing. We cannot conceive of any of this; but when the power to generate is set in motion by the *Will of Heaven*, we perceive Perfection manifested (passive perfection), and we realise that our highest conception of Perfection has its cause in the *Will of Heaven*. And so, by analogy, we give to the incomprehensible *Khien* this name of *the Will of Heaven*, of which we grasp nothing but the effects, yet through which alone we can grasp that there is a First Cause.

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[2] Father Gaubil, Father Amyot and the other missionaries, Mr Rémusat, Mr Julien and the other members of the Institute, had as the basis for their opinion nothing but the translations they *themselves* had made of a few Chinese texts; thus they reasoned by an unconscious circular argument, since, having no experience of the language or ideographic writing beyond that found in dictionaries, they had already translated the texts by following the natural inclination of their minds.

[3] *The Metaphysical Way*, ch. III.

We have also seen, in the same exposition[4] that the Will of Heaven manifests to us the Perfection *Khouen* (principle of passivity, or perfection brought about by the principle of activity). It is this Perfection, dual in *persons*, in the Latin sense of the word, but of a single essence, whose Will or Celestial Activity brings about the birth of beings from the Being, and hurls them indefinitely into the temporal and contingent flow of forms. The Will of Heaven acts according to a certain mechanism, and the activity of Heaven manifests itself according to a certain movement (mechanism and movement being metaphysical and ontological, of course). This mechanism, traversed by this movement, is what constitutes the divine guiding principles of Universal Creation.

We have identified the components of this mechanism and the elements of this movement, and from them we have deduced the helical spiral of evolution [5] . This spiral is the absolute mathematical condensation of all the final modifications and transformations of the Universe; that is to say, in Shipingwen's own words, of the mechanisms that produce and into which all beings are reabsorbed.

The source of these mechanisms is Laozi's *Tao*, or the *Way*. It is not enough for us to support this categorical assertion with the philosopher's clear and definitive texts: the manifested *Tao* is the mother of the Universe… the multitude of beings passes through the gate of *the Tao* (*Tao,* page I)… the *Tao* is the end, but also the means (it is the river) where the ten thousand beings have their source (*Tao,* page IV)… the *Tao* reintegrates men into non-being (*Tao,* page XIV)… the spiral, that is the movement of *the Tao* (*Te,* page III)… The *Tao* created one; one created two; two created three; three created the ten thousand beings (*Te,* page V). He who follows the *Tao* progresses, progresses and progresses still, and so on until he no longer acts; yet whilst he no longer acts, he is not without action (*Te,* page XI). The *Tao* produces; virtue unites; beings take shape; they become modes (*Te,* page XIV). – One might perhaps be content with such aphorisms; they indicate very clearly their traditionalism and their connection to *the Yijing*.

But one must be convinced that the philosophers of China, unlike the European philosophers who, after them, believed they had discovered and perfected Laozi, always taught that their Master had drawn his doctrine from antiquity. Confucius says: 'All things owe their constitution and the acquisition of formal life to the principle of *Chien*; yet the *Tao* is the gateway through which all things have passed to come into being.'

Xu You said: "It is from *the Tao* that all beings have obtained that which constitutes their nature." Zhu Xi, even more expressively, declared: 'The meaning of *the K'ien* is illuminated only by the celestial *Tao*.' And what gives this assertion definitive weight is that Tzu-hi recorded it in his *Commentary*, which today forms part of the traditional glosses, and is inserted, in the *K'ien* chapter itself, in the *I Ching*, alongside Wen-wang's tetragrammatic formula.

It must therefore be recognised that the teachings of Fohi and those of Laozi are one and the same, despite the claims of the ignorant

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[4] *The Metaphysical Way*, ch. III and IV.
[5] *Ibid.*, ch. III and VI.

European analysts, whose opinions cannot, in any way, take precedence over the certainty of the Yellow Scholars. Whereas Fohi speaks with the sole aim of universal synthesis, Laozi speaks with the aim of ascetic esotericism. Yet, with equal strides, the two Sages walk the same *Way of Heaven*.

Let us add a few texts which, even more so than Tsouhi's commentary, form an integral part of *the I Ching* and its classical teaching: 'When it comes to Heaven, if one speaks of it in absolute terms, it is the Heaven that opposes nothing: it is the *rational Way* or *Tao*; it is the activity or the beginning of all beings' (*Yijing*, § I^{er}, Commentary by Chengzi).

The *Judgements*, or imperial glosses of the official Ming edition, state:
"Wenwang elucidates the meaning of the word *K'ien* simply by means of *the* immutable *Tao* of Heaven. It is the whole of Heaven."

"The end and the beginning of *the Tao* are illuminated by a great light, so that one sees the six situations (the six lines of the *K'ien* hexagram) each presenting themselves in due course. The first and last lines are the beginning and the end of *the Tao*. The *Tao* is change and transformation, brought about by activity; it gives rise to all beings: what heaven bestows is destiny; what beings receive is their nature; the *Tao* of heaven and earth is permanent; it maintains the ultimate Harmony" *(Yijing,* § 7, Traditional Commentary by Chengzi).

To continue drawing parallels between these quotations would be pedantic and rambling; those cited above are sufficient to demonstrate conclusively that Laozi's doctrine is a direct emanation of, and a profound application to an intellectual and social context, the Primordial Tradition. We shall see, in the course of our examination, the striking traces of this lineage. Let us be aware that we may continue our study of the concise and mysterious texts of the leader of Taoism, and that therein we shall find, alongside the divine teachings of the Ancestors, the most beautiful, yet also the most austere method of asceticism ever offered to humanity.

CHAPTER III

The *Tao*

The direct work left by Laozi, which has influenced and will continue to influence the minds of men for a long time to come with singular power, is, in material terms, one of the least substantial that exists.

It comprises three short works, or concise treatises, of which only the first two are directly the work of the master: these are the *Tao*, or 'Book of the Way'; the *Te* or 'Book of Virtue' (or of 'Righteousness'); the third, which is an oral tradition, is the *Kan-Ing*, or 'Book of Sanctions'[1] . These three treatises are written in the form of those aphorisms or maxims which Chinese scholars have, of all times, been particularly fond of. The aphorisms often follow one another in a syllogistic manner; they are also maxims, axioms, proverbs, or, where appropriate, exclamations; they are always very short: the characters that form them are carefully chosen from among those that contain the most significant
'essence of ideas'. They make a strong impression on the memory. And many have entered everyday language. This was evidently the aim Laozi was pursuing with this very special style of writing.

Lovers of philology and scholarly debate will find ample material to satisfy them in the studies by Pauthier, Rémusat and Stanislas Julien. These gentlemen, following translations which, in all honesty, cannot be praised, have produced highly commendable discussions and bibliographies. We refer readers to these works regarding these didactic subjects[2] .

As regards translations of Laozi, we may say that the first, Pauthier's, is certainly the most commendable, and that its author fell short of perfection only because he sought, against all odds, to Christianise the Chinese master. We should also mention a more recent translation, which is certainly inaccurate from a purely linguistic point of view, but very effective, precisely because of its length

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[1] Or rather, *concordant Actions and Reactions*.

[2] *La Sainte Légende*, trans. by Pauthier, Paris, Dondey, Dupré, 1831.
Commentary drawn from the Tao-te-King, by the same author.
Memoir on the works and life of Laozi, by A. Rémusat, in the Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et belles-lettres. Volume VII.
Philosophical Remarks, by Montucci, Berlin, 1808. Asian
Miscellany, by A. Rémusat.
The Book of the Way and Virtue, trans. by Stanislas Julien, Paris, 1842.

and its shortcomings, perhaps intentional, in bringing Laozi's ideas to the minds of modern Westerners[3] .

Finally, we have provided, in two volumes, an accurate translation of the Book of *the Tao* and the Book of *the Te*, on which we have no further comment to make, save that it has been reviewed and approved, in the Far East by the sages who hold the heritage of Taoist Science, and that the son of one of them, having come to France specifically for this purpose, collaborated until the very last day on our translation and the commentaries and notes that follow it[4] .

We reproduce here the translation of the *Tao*, followed by the doctrine—hitherto unpublished in the West—with which the Taoist masters orally accompany the teaching of the text. In it one will find the whole Way and the whole Tradition.

I. – *The Way that can be spoken of is not the Way. The name that can be named is not the Name. Nameless, it is the origin of heaven and earth; named, it is the mother of the Ten Thousand Things. With the faculty of non-perception, one comes close to grasping it; with the faculty of perception, one grasps its form. These are truly two things. Appearing together, their name is simple; to explain them together, their origin is obscure; obscure, this origin continually grows more obscure. It is the Gate through which the innumerable beings pass.*

One cannot define the *Tao,* neither by giving it a name nor by applying to it a human intellectual conception. To believe that *the Tao* is defined in one's mind (at least until one has received, scrutinised and assimilated the doctrine within oneself) is proof that one does not understand it, *and that one cannot follow it*: such is the profound meaning of the meeting between Laozi and Confucius, which we have recounted above.

When the *Tao* has no name—that is to say, when, from the human perspective, it does not exist—then it is truly itself, that is to say, the single, powerful source of Heaven and Earth (or of the two perfections: Heaven, the active perfection; Earth, the passive perfection). This origin is unique, since Heaven and Earth are not *separated by the gift of existence*; this origin is powerful, since nothing can fail to emerge from it; this origin is obscure, since nothing has yet emerged from it; it must be added that the omnipotence of the origin is only such insofar as it is not yet manifested, for it is then omnipotent to produce Everything, and at the moment of the Conception of the Idea, it produces Nothing; and one will no longer be able to say this once it has begun to produce.

It begins to produce when it has a name, whatever that may be, which suits it, and it produces Everything; but it is the Mother, that is to say, the consequence of the Will of Heaven has feminised the Power. From then on, it Is and it Is not.

However, these truths are not comprehensible to the sensible nature of man; he could not begin to conceive them unless he possessed the faculty of not feeling, that is to say, unless he had lost the form that gave him sensitivity; from that moment on, he does not

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[3] *The Book of the Way and the Straight Path*, trans. by A. Ular, Paris, *Revue blanche*, 1902.

[4] *The Tao of Laozi*, trans. by Matgioi, Paris, 1894.
The T'ai Ch'ing of Lao-tzu, trans. by Matgioi, Paris, 1895.

does not conceive these truths, but he becomes sufficiently receptive to their conception. On the contrary, if man retains the faculty of feeling, he no longer attains the possibility of conception, but he attains the reality of external understanding; that is to say, he understands the forms through which the intentions of the Will of Heaven flow. This is certainly true, but precisely because he perceives the forms, he is prevented from conceiving the single Idea that these multiple forms embody.

However, the will of Heaven and its effects are one and the same thing, and they appear to us as two things, because we perceive them only through reflections[5], which are two visible and intelligible reflections of a single, invisible and inconceivable Thing… Of these two reflections appearing together, the name is easy, for we give a name to each of them, and thus the human mind delights in duality and diversity; but, of these two reflections, explained in parallel, the origin is obscure, because it is unique; and, as one seeks to explain it, and covers it with characteristics and assessments, it recedes and becomes ever more obscure. Yet one may say that the origin is the gateway through which passes the Universality of that which Is.

II. – *The beings of the universe know what is good; they desire to do good; yet at the appointed time for good, behold, evil*[6] *. These beings know what is upright: they desire to do what is upright, yet behold, the unrighteous. – One and its opposite are born together; the difficult and the easy bring each other into being: the great and the small appear through one another; the high and the low define one another; tone and sound harmonise. The before and the after govern one another. Thus the perfect man acts not, yet is not inferior: to act and to be silent, such is his doctrine. The ten thousand beings labour, and he does not forget them: he brings them forth but does not possess them. He nurtures them but derives no benefit from them; they have merits, but he does not share in them. No, of course not. Having built this house, he does not dwell in it.*

The consciousness of beings is determined solely by the value and diversity of their actions. Beings believe they know and desire the Beautiful and the Good; if they act, they act in accordance with their knowledge and desires; they therefore believe they are acting in the Beautiful and the Good, at least according to the conceptions they have formed of them. But, if they do one thing, there is another thing, which is the opposite of the first, and which they do not do; this thing, being the opposite of what is called the Beautiful and the Good, is the Ugly and the Evil; from which it follows that it is action that differentiates and defines the states of beings' consciousness, and that it is the beautiful action that creates the Ugly, and the good action that creates the Evil. Thus, these notions are interdependent, determined by one another, and non-existent without one another; that is to say, in truth they do not exist in relation to what Is, and derive their appearance of reality solely from states of consciousness, which is illusory from the perspective of Being.

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[5] Those who confuse these two reflections with the single Idea, and who make them into two equal Ideas, are precisely those whom, in the West, we call Manicheans.

[6] Chapter I of *the Tao* is the origin of the cosmic world; Chapter II is the origin of the world of consciousness.

All other relationships in the universe thus determine one another, and have no real existence either, but only artificial connections, which last only for the duration of the action that creates them.

Thus, action, because it determines, and because of the specialisations it imposes on the things it determines, is an inferior thing; therefore, the sage who is not inferior and who does not wish to become so, does not act. But this non-action, like that of the Way, is not inaction; for the Way, which takes no part in the movements, ideas, labours or merits of beings, has produced them; that is to say, it is the mechanism by which beings can move, think, labour and merit. Thus, whilst beings, thanks to the Way, develop, it does not develop, and remains unchanging. It has provided the cause, and takes no interest in the objects; beings are the subjects of the cause and the dispensers of the effects, in the course of time. Such is the true distinction between things. This is why it is said that the *Way* is like one who has provided the plan, the materials for a house and the strength to build it, yet cannot dwell therein.

III. – *Not to exalt the wise is to wish that men should not struggle; without wealth, and with the difficulty of becoming wealthy, is to wish that men should not fight for their interests; not to regard things through the lens of desire and emotion is to wish that men should have peace of mind. This is what the perfect man commands: an empty heart, a beautiful exterior; a humble appearance, a vigorous body. It is to wish that men neither know nor desire. It is to wish to know how to act, yet not to go so far as to act. To act also consists in not acting. Thus one is never without action.*

This is the means of mitigating the consequences of action, and the dualistic sentiment provoked by action in the human consciousness. The Master grasps action and its consequences in the three worlds: in the material, it is wealth; in the emotional, it is desire; in the intellectual, it is wisdom. Yet the sight of wealth drives those who do not possess it to struggle; the craving for desire drives men whose hearts are not at peace to passion; the exaltation of the wise drives those who do not possess wisdom to rebellion.

Material strife, emotional passion, intellectual rebellion: these are the three deplorable states brought about by action—even when deemed good by the conscience—and by the repetition of that action. If, therefore, one finds oneself in the human state of consciousness, one must mitigate the consequences: one must possess no wealth, one must despise the objects of desire, and one must not bring the wise into the limelight. Thus, and despite action, one may preserve peace by concealing from the people the ever-fatal consequences of action. Therefore, the commandment of the perfect man and the rule of his conduct is to have a heart free from passion and void of sentiment, beneath a kind spirit and a vast intellect; it is also to possess, with a vigorous temperament and a strong character, as few passions as possible.

All riches, both moral and material, thus remain hidden beneath a ‘beautiful exterior’. The people, who know nothing of them, do not desire them, and so their hearts remain at peace.

Yet what does the wise man do, who is secretly endowed with all will and all power? He applies himself to doing nothing. And, in wishing to do nothing, he actually acts; that is why his non-action is not inaction, but true action. At the same time he acts and does not act. And he is thus like the Way, which brought forth beings without participating in their movements. The will to be non-acting is the sum of all actions; the will to be motionless is the sum of all movements; the will to be without passion is the sum of all desires. And thus, the gifted man possesses, in total and in reality, all the things which he did not will, in appearance and in their particularity.

IV. – *The Way is the end, but also the means. Undoubtedly, it is bottomless; it is the river from which the ten thousand beings spring. The gifted man speaks peacefully; he determines fate; he balances splendour; he balances darkness; he is like a dutiful son. But I do not know that one alone of whom he is the son. He is the image of the Master's Ancestor.*

The Way is the end when man speaks of it; the Way is the means when man considers it from the universe's perspective. This centon summarises the nature of the Way in relation to the individual's circumstances[7] . Man, as an individual cast into the vital circle of *yin-yang*, has the Way as his end, since it is on the universal evolutionary spiral that all particular circles come to an end. But the personality, detached from the individual, has the Way as its means, since it is by utilising all the points of the spiral that it attains, with and through this spiral, the ultimate and reintegrating transformation. Thus all personalities, which are the eternal flowers of the Way, and even all individualities, which are the fleeting colours and ephemeral scents of these flowers, have the bottomless Way as their source. Of all this, the sage, 'who has unlocked fate', that is to say, who knows the beneficial succession of the universe's destinies, speaks with tranquillity. He stands at equal distance from splendour and darkness, and is thus the pious son of the Way. It is therefore impossible to know whose spiritual son he is. But he embodies the traits of the Great Ancestor, who is the Ancestor of the Master (Laozi).

V. – *Are heaven and earth without beauty? Then the ten thousand beings are empty. Is the perfect man without beauty? Then the hundred families are empty. Heaven and earth are regular: how is it that men act irregularly? They are empty, and do not know it; they stir themselves, and in stirring themselves drift apart. They chatter, and in chattering deceive themselves. Not so is he who keeps his thoughts silent within his heart.*

If heaven and earth were not united (beauty being the call to union), the universe would not exist (the union of Heaven and Earth is the quintessential product of the Will). If the perfect man did not exist, humanity would have no example to follow, would be inert, and as though non-existent. However, heaven and earth are united, and the perfect man exists; that is to say, all is in order in the universe.

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[7] See The *Metaphysical Way*, ch. VIII, p. 129 ff.

How is it that the individuals who make up humanity act as though they had no such examples before their eyes? Their actions lead them astray from the Way; their words lead them astray from the truth. How much happier, how much closer to the Way is he who remains silent and does nothing, and keeps all his thoughts and all his power within himself.

VI. – *The depths of the mind do not die: they lie in profound darkness. Profound and dark is the* Tao*: heaven and earth form its root. To think, and think again, like a dutiful son, is the way to success. There is no need to touch.*

When the mind truly thinks, deep within itself, what it ought to think, it thinks of the will of Heaven, and of its means, the *Tao*; and, in thinking of them, it identifies with them. It is therefore eternal, and in the deepest darkness, like the very root of Heaven and Earth[8] . These are things one must think about always and ceaselessly, to attain the true conception of them; thus does the dutiful son think continually of his dead father and his departed ancestors, though he cannot see them, and though their invisibility in no way diminishes the intensity of his thought. So thinks the Sage; and if he wished to touch, and believed he could touch, the object of his thought, it would be because his thought would not be directed towards the goal, which is intangible, just as the very spirit of the dead is reintegrated into that goal.

VII. – *Heaven and earth are infinite; heaven and earth live eternally in the infinite. Surely they are not themselves begotten; that is why we know they are eternal. Thus men cannot yet take the perfect man as their model; but later men will become like heaven. To the perfect man, men are strangers; yet he is affectionate towards them. He loses nothing; he deceives no one. Alone, he can acquire.*

Being and living in infinity, heaven and earth are beyond the reach of men. Heaven-earth, that is to say, the original Will that brought them into being, did not bring itself into being, nor could it have been brought into being by others (being original). It is therefore eternal. The Sage who follows the designs of this Will is today far above men; in the future, not only will all men be Sages, but they will be one with Heaven. In the meantime, the Sage loves men, from whom, however, he expects nothing; he loses nothing of his strength, since he does not act; he commits no falsehood, since he does not speak. The affection of all beings, the contraction of the will and silence—these, then, are the means of becoming a Sage.

VIII. – *Pure water is supreme: is water pure? The ten thousand beings are perfect, yet they remain unmoved. Where the multitude of the wicked is, there the method of the Way is applied. Is the earth pure? Hearts are pure as a river. Are all men pure? They act in pure trust. They act purely, righteously; they work purely; they are accustomed to being influenced purely, though they are not moved. That is why there is no need for a method there.*

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[8] The Root is in reality, not merely the origin, but the Original Will.

This page indicates the time when the study and method of the Way are necessary. When men are wicked (that is to say, when, contrary to the previous precept, they lack universal affection, and lose themselves in vain deeds and deceitful words), the method is necessary.

But when the heart of the Sage and the hearts of men are like pure water—that is to say, clear and simple—then trust and righteousness reign: the influence of the Way alone acts upon all, without stirring their emotions; for simple nature is superior to emotions; human sentimentality and sensitivity, the sole causes of the dissipation of will (vain deeds and words), have vanished, and men obey Reason alone. From then on, there is no longer any need for method.

IX. – *To take much and keep it is not the same as having enough. To act abruptly, then rest: a situation impossible to sustain. Gold and diamonds in abundance, within the family: impossible to keep. Rich and vain: wealth flows outwards of its own accord. The man who deserves and whose name is renowned is concerned only with making his spirit superior. This is the Way.*

This is the first page of moral asceticism, the precept of detachment from external things, which is the natural consequence of the precept of the inner contraction of the mind. One must keep only what is necessary; one must perform only the necessary action and the necessary rest, without haste.

One must not retain any wealth (for to possess it leads to boasting, and boasting leads to its loss). There is but one condition worthy of the Sage: that of continually increasing the value of one's spirit. This is the true method of the Way.

X. – *Men bear body and blood as a shell they cannot cast off. The spirit is passed on in the same way, through children, and to the very end of the line; it remains, to the very end, obscure or clear. Heaven loves all things and commands all. But not all act alike. The gate of Heaven opens and closes; thus Heaven tests. Though men see clearly on all sides, yet they do not discern well. Those who are born gather the merits of their fathers. They wish to beget, yet cannot. They labour, yet produce nothing. They wish to expand, yet bring nothing new. This too is a way, but a lesser way.*

This page describes the human condition contrary to that of page VIII, for which the precepts of page IX were devised. It is necessary – and this is inherent in humanity – that man carry his body and his blood (the second lower element of the human septenary: material movement) to the end of its present modification; likewise, the spirit of a race is perpetuated hereditarily in the children, along with the fundamental qualities of that spirit. Since these qualities of the spirit are a gift from Heaven, whether they are obscure or clear, Heaven will take no account of them. Heaven takes account only of the efforts one makes to know it, and not of the result of those efforts.

These efforts are not equal among all men, and above all are not exerted on the same level. Although, thanks to Heaven, they may see the light, they do not yet know how to use it; that is to say, they do not use it to see objects (to determine the conditions of Wisdom). Of course, they gather the merits of their fathers; but, in gathering these merits, they also inherit their mediocre nature.

And so they act in an inferior manner. They understand what needs to be done, but fail to do it. Remaining entirely human, they have desire, and rely on desire to act; but they lack reason, and therefore do not rely on reason to succeed. Therefore they produce nothing, and their minds create nothing new to expand their knowledge (which is the true precept of the Way). Nevertheless, they have merits, since they strive. And their labour is a path towards the Way. But it is by no means the Way itself.

XI. – *Thirty spokes joined together form a wheel; on their own, they are useless; if there is a chariot upon them, one can make use of them. To take direct possession of a property is not appropriate; but if one has a property, one may make use of it. To build a house, to furnish or repair a house, is not appropriate; but if there is a house, one may make use of it. That is why possession is a bad thing; use is a proper thing.*

This chapter has an exoteric meaning and an esoteric meaning; the translation above is the exoteric meaning; it simply preaches selflessness and contempt for wealth from a moral standpoint: the Sage must use, not possess; in the contingent world, he must make use of what exists, and not create what does not exist; for use does not imply ownership, however long the use may be; and thus the Sage is never attached to what he uses, whereas he might be tempted to become attached to it if what he uses belonged to him.

From this we derive a perfectly logical political lesson, namely the condemnation of private property when it exceeds the satisfaction of man's normal needs. Since no one is to possess, and everyone may use, property becomes collective, and every citizen voluntarily deprived of the right of possession acquires an equal and general right of use. In practice, this is not state socialism, which can only take root in societies previously conditioned by hereditary and autocratic monarchism; but it is—and China has practised it for over four thousand years—communism, or collective ownership of the clan, the ethnographic generator of the social entity known as the commune (or village), all members of the clan (or inhabitants of the village) being inalienably equal in the use and enjoyment of communal property.

There is, in this regard, a very profound esoteric and metaphysical meaning, the translation of which is as follows. This translation is just as accurate as the first: one need only raise the characters to the metaphysical plane:

Thirty spokes joined together form a wheel; on their own, they are useless: it is the space THAT UNITES THEM *that makes them a wheel that can be used. A property that one touches and takes is useless: it is the air surrounding it that makes it a good that can be used. Building, moving, or repairing the materials*

of a house—that is what is unusable; it is the void between the materials that makes a house that can be used: that is why matter and its possession are evil; only that which is not matter or possession is usable.

Thus, the fundamental principle is set out once more: the material is contingent; only the immaterial exists; Being is manifested alone, Non-Being is. Yet, by a most daring corollary, the material is usable only through the immaterial. The contingency we perceive is perceptible to us only through the absolute, which we do not perceive. The Being we understand is intelligible to us only through Non-Being, which we do not understand. The Taoist comparison, transposed into the divine realm, would provide the most irrefutable of theological proofs of the 'Existence of God'. The esoteric meaning of page XI of *the Tao* cannot be explored too deeply. – Let us simply recognise that nothing we see, think or conceive is free from the express and continuous cooperation of THAT which we can neither see, nor perceive, nor conceive, and that, consequently, all our actions, even the most material, and all our thoughts, even the most subtle, are an involuntary and invincible acknowledgement of the Great Mystery.

XII. – The five colours: the intelligent man distinguishes them with his eyes. The five tones: the intelligent man perceives them with his ears. The five flavours, the intelligent man tastes them with his mouth. With a swift movement, like that of a rat in a rice field, all this spreads thus within the mind of the intelligent man. All things that are difficult to acquire, the intelligent man works at them with perseverance. Thus, man works, but not in public; that is why he does the first thing in public, and the second in secret.

The Master indicates here how one must act to attain knowledge; whilst physical knowledge is acquired, mechanically, so to speak, through the active engagement of the five senses, intellectual knowledge is acquired only through stubborn and assiduous labour; whilst the results of perception are swift, like the rat's dash through the rice field, the results of conceptualisation are slow and obscure. Thus, the first of these sciences can be acquired amongst the multitude; the other is obtained only through and in isolation.

It should also be noted that, as regards the process, difficult things can only be acquired after the easy ones, and by means of the very easy ones – that is to say, in reality, not through them in themselves, which serve no purpose, but through the intellectual channel that their comprehension has carved out in the brain of the diligent man.

XIII. – *The trembling of the lips is a sign of being seized by fear. Why are the rich and the famous anxious, just like me, who am poor? And how is the trembling of the rich man's lips a sign of his fear? It is because he trembles at the thought of falling. When he possesses wealth, he is likewise seized by fear. When he has lost, he is likewise seized by fear. In what way are the rich and the illustrious seized by fear, just like me, who am poor? We, we are greatly troubled; here is why: heaven has made us with a personality; if it had not made us with a personality, why would we be troubled? It is*

why the rich man must think of helping all men; it is fitting that he should be their trustee; thus, he will have the pious loyalty of all men: it is fitting that this should be clearly known to all men.

The Master always first provides tangible evidence for his reasoning. And so, to demonstrate the difference between the rich man and the wise man, he points out that the rich man is perpetually in a state of fear: fear of losing his wealth whilst he still possesses it; and, when he has lost it, fear of being unable to live without it, for he has not learnt to sustain his existence by his own means. And this life, truly unbearable, is of no use to him, since his concerns are directed solely towards material things, which must one day abandon him.

The wise man, too, is anxious, but he is anxious about the eternal personality that Heaven has fashioned for him, which he cannot cast off, but which his continual anxiety perfects and adorns with merit.

The Master holds as an axiom – and universal experience does not prove him wrong – that the possession of wealth is contrary to the clarity of the mind, and that thus the rich man cannot, unless he practises the renunciation of wealth, obtain the merits that the wise and diligent man can obtain, whose concerns are loftier. Nevertheless, the rich man may attain other merits; and he may attain them, according to the theorem set out on page XII, through the lesser means at his disposal. He will attain them if he helps men and acts as their guardian. Thus, wealth will be excused and justified by its purpose; and the rich man shares in the intellectual merits of the Sages who have worked for him, if he helps them to carry out their work without distraction, by allowing them to share in his material goods. There is a reciprocity here that should be borne in mind, and from which the rich man derives all the benefit; for whilst the sages can do without riches, the rich man cannot do without the merits of the sages. And thus the sages give more than they receive.

Let us also bear in mind, from a social perspective, that the Master regards the rich as stewards in relation to other men, and that in this way he extends to individuals and movable property the communist theory that governs communities and the distribution of the earth's goods.

XIV. – *One looks, yet does not see the Way; its name is called 'Lack'. One listens, yet does not hear the Way; its name is called 'Subtle'. One seeks, yet does not touch the Way; its name is called 'Emptiness'. These three things cannot be made clear; that is why, though many, they are nevertheless one thing. Its upper part is not evident; its lower part is not hidden. The Eternal Way has no name that suits it. It returns beings to non-being. Thus, having no form is its form; having no outside is its outside: thus, men suffer continually in seeking it. Ahead of the Way, one cannot see its head; behind it, one cannot see its back. By studying the Way for a very long time, sages may come into being; the sage teaches the past and the present: thus, he knows the Way.*

Here, the Master gives the definition of *the Tao*, which embodies all the qualities of non-being; on the intellectual plane, it cannot be grasped by reason; it is absence; on the emotional plane, it cannot be perceived through love: it is the subtle; on the

physical level, it cannot be sensed through the senses: it is the void. Thus, the *Tao* eludes the three planes on which humanity can grasp a concept. That is why, being unable to conceive of it, we perceive its essence as negative. The *Tao* is three and one: it is three in its threefold affirmation of non-being; it is one in its identification with non-being. And all things cannot but remain obscure to men. Nowhere is the nature of the *Tao*, and what the human mind can infer from it, stated more explicitly. But what, then, does the *Tao* do, if it is not non-being? And what is the purpose of its distinction from these two identical entities? It is that the *Tao* reintegrates beings into non-being. But let us remember that the *Tao* does not act: it is not a force, it is a *mechanism*. In a word, ONE IS ACTED UPON BY THE TAO. Let us recall the definition given by the philosopher Shipingwen in his commentary on *the I Ching*: transformation is the mechanism that reintegrates all beings after the series of modifications. The *Yijing* thus revealed the full nature of *the Tao*, more than two thousand years before Laozi gave it the name by which it is still known. Who acts within the *Tao*? The will of Heaven. What, then, must beings do? Know the *Tao*, and once they know it, do not act.

Thus, formless, boundless, and without an exterior, is the *Tao*; yet it must govern beings who are beings of form, of boundaries, and of an exterior, and who can therefore understand, perceive, and feel only the exterior, the boundaries, and the forms.

This is why the Way is difficult, and why, to conform to it, the Sages must go against their nature, and consequently suffer… One cannot see the Way, neither ahead when walking with it, nor behind when looking back upon it: if, therefore, one believes oneself assured because one sees, perceives or understands something, this is, on the contrary, proof that one is not in accordance with the Way[9] .

XV. – *In former times, the Sages devoted themselves to teaching; they were few in number, profound, mysterious and penetrating. Withdrawn, one could not understand them; though we cannot understand them, let us strive to discern their appearance. They were circumspect; like one crossing a frozen river; prudent, like one who fears on all sides; indifferent, like a stranger. We, however, are like things that drown and vanish, coarse as hard objects, empty as holes. Between us and the Sages, there is something like troubled water. The Sage, who remembers, stops the movement of the troubled water, and makes it very clear; the Sage, who remembers, and who has attained peace, obtains a very long life. Thus he observes the Way; he does not spread himself thin, and continues not to wish to spread himself thin; thus the Sage preserves himself, and has no need to renew himself.*

This page, quite simple, needs no explanation. It sets out the difference in outward attitude between the sages and those who are not, whilst striving to imitate and follow them. One notes that the qualities

[9] It is in this chapter, which constitutes the metaphysical essence of Taoism, that Mr Abel Rémusat attributed to Laozi the knowledge of the name of *Jehovah*; 'lack' in Chinese is I; 'subtle' is HI; 'emptiness' is WEI; IHIWEI, IHV, *Jehovah*. During the Restoration, such imaginings were written without a smile, and the year following such a fine discovery, Mr Abel Rémusat was appointed a member of the Institute.

The Sage's positive inner qualities are expressed through negative outward qualities, and through the effacement of the entire tangible individual in favour of the elusive personality.

XVI. – *A man who is hindered from reaching his goal still walks in the direction of the natural slope; the ten thousand beings walk and work, men conform and follow. All these things, obscure together, return to their origin. To return to one's origin is to be at peace; to be at peace is to conform. To conform is to remember; to know how to remember is to be clear-sighted. Not knowing how to remember leads to acting wrongly without realising it. To know how to remember is to acquire lasting merit. Lasting merit makes one a king; a king is sustained by Heaven; Heaven is sustained by the Way. The Way endures in eternity; thus, the races never come to an end.*

The Master speaks of his hidden thought on ceaseless evolution; it is as necessary and natural as the inclination to descend the mountain slope; even when hindered by the limitations of his species, man moves towards evolution; the universality of things, spread throughout the flow of forms, evolves: men follow this movement and conform to it.

By conforming to this movement – which is the helical movement of universal evolution – men return to their origin. The Master applies, to this return to the origin, a double series of syllogistic centons, one on the universal metaphysical plane, the other on the beneficial plane of personal asceticism.

A return to the source constitutes peace, through and within the natural course of destinies; this peace is in accordance with the original designs of Heaven's Will. But peace attained through conformity to these designs enables the one who enjoys it to remember, and thus grants them insight into the past, knowledge of the present, and an intuition of the analogous future.

What personal benefit do the degrees of this metaphysical scale confer? Knowledge of beings and awareness of one's own being lead to the acquisition of lasting merits. And these lasting merits lead the individual to kingship, the king to heaven, heaven to the Way, and the Way itself into Eternity. This is why the harmony of views that individuals have with Heaven leads to the infinite.

XVII. – *The Great Leader: the people below know he exists. At times they love him and think of him; at other times they fear him; at yet other times they revile him. To have little trust is to have no trust at all. Therefore, to speak wisely, and so that personal merits may be acquired, all men must act naturally.*

This progression of individuality, which corresponds to an intellectual and moral regression, applies equally to metaphysical transcendence and to social contingency. When humanity is united with Heaven, it loves it; when it differs from it, it fears it; when it opposes it, it reviles it. When kings

did not make their authority felt[10] , they practised non-action: the subjects, feeling no trace of their rule, loved them. When kings, having become distinct from Heaven, sought to perform actions parallel to Heaven, the subjects became aware of their power, and, though it was still to their advantage, feared it. When kings, opposed to Heaven and definitively set apart, acted without concern for conformity to Heaven, the subjects suffered from their power and detested it. And thus, by the very act of action alone, a general sense of inferiority and mutual distrust arose. – The teaching of the Way leads one to act naturally, that is to say, without motives, even laudable ones, for a laudable motive presupposes the existence of an opposite motive, which is blameworthy. Having no motive for action leads the wise man not to act, and this is the goal indicated by the Way.

XVIII. – *Men who practise the Great Way possess justice and humanity. Practising wisdom, they have respect for reflection. Men who are not united are selfish. Is the empire troubled and in confusion? Here are the* Hoan *officers*[11] .

In the Way, justice and humanity exist unconsciously; yet they are as though they did not exist, for there is no one who is neither just nor humane, and one can only say that a man is just and humane when there is, beside him and at the same time as him, a man who possesses neither justice nor humanity. Justice and humanity are therefore only invoked to convert those who lack them; they therefore exist only when the Great Way is lost. This requires intelligence, and human intelligence practises and respects reflection; this is what causes the loss of the Way, according to which one must act naturally and without reasoning.

Likewise, disunity amongst men creates individuals, and individuals can possess nothing but selfishness. Likewise, disunity amongst the countries of the Empire produces confusion, and unrest can be suppressed only by force. Thus, and in all these ways, man is far from the Way.

XIX. – *The Sage's penetrating mind possesses virtue and wisdom; thus people are perfect in a hundred ways. The penetrating mind possesses the virtues of humanity; thus people obey and show filial piety. The penetrating mind possesses virtues and power; thus there are no more thieves or pirates. Here are truly three things: shall we labour enough to understand them? The Sage holds them fast; he sees the good that is veiled and hidden; he seeks to delve even deeper into the truth.*

In the intellectual realm, as in the emotional and the material, the Sage's spirit reigns supreme; in the first he possesses knowledge, and by imparting it to men, they become perfect. In the emotional realm he possesses humanity, and by imbuing men with it, they become flexible and devout. Finally, in the material realm, he possesses power, and by making men feel it, evil and the wicked vanish. This seems very good, and yet it is less and less so; for

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[10] The 'Great Chief' in the literal text refers equally to Heaven and to political rulers.

[11] *Hoan* is the title given to the former commanders-in-chief, appointed temporarily to suppress revolts, and who were scarcely esteemed, due to their lack of knowledge.

the Sage acts on all three planes, and can he foresee the outcome of his action? What would happen if men were too narrow-minded to receive his wisdom, too hard-hearted to feel his humanity, too wicked to accept his power? And, if we assume that an intellectual action makes men learned, that a moral action makes men pious, that a material action makes men honest and God-fearing, then it follows that it is possible for men to be neither learned, nor pious, nor honest. Whereas, in reality, if the action had not taken place, the alternative would not have arisen. There would have been no men who were perfect, narrow-minded, pious, barbaric, honest or thieves: there would have been a static humanity, without direct or reflexive action, following its Way. This is a delicate conclusion to draw, and that is why the Master wonders whether people will reflect deeply enough to grasp the full meaning of what he intended to say.

XX. – *The mind that studies is not anxious. As equals, men walk the same path. The good walk with the wicked. Though they walk together, they are not confused. Men are anxious: it is impossible not to be anxious. The dissolute cannot yet bear calamities; and this crowd rejoices, as if happy, very thoughtlessly, as if ascending to the Temple during the* Xuan *months. They think: I am young, and it is not yet time to be unhappy; I am like the child who has not yet weaned. I say: yes, yes, but I am like the child who does not return in due order. All men have superfluous things; I alone do not cling to them. Upon these men, of foolish hearts, misfortunes now befall. But how frivolous they are. They claim to have an enlightened mind; yet they alone are troubled. They claim their minds are diligent; yet they alone are sorrowful and vague; they are like the sea, confused as that which is not at rest. Men seek to acquire, thinking: we alone are important; it is easy for us to be men; our mother is rich enough to feed us.*

This entire page contains nothing but simple observations to urge men to be wary that the same outward appearance accompanies both those who know and those who, willingly or not, remain ignorant. Easy happiness, which is so pleasant to feel and which everyone is permitted to obtain—that is to say, the kind that consists of a charming life, the contemplation of natural beauty, and the enjoyment of the advantages within our reach—this easy happiness is no more conducive to the acquisition of wisdom than great wealth, which is dangerous by virtue of its very magnitude.

To rely, for sustenance and prosperity, on the intervention of one's wealthy parents is a sign of cowardice, inertia and impotence; to rely, for one's progress, solely on the evolutionary necessity of the universe and on the mechanical conditions of human asceticism is a sign of stupidity, intellectual inadequacy and a total misunderstanding of the Way.

XXI. – *Radiant and supreme virtue brings about the Way. The Way bestows abundance upon all things; though the wise man waits a long time, he remains patient; he remains patient because, in his heart, he already has a foundation; thus he waits, and he remains*

patience; he already has abundance; he understands and he calls, for in his heart he has the spirit, that spirit being faithful and upright. In his heart he has hope; he has never forgotten these names. He instructs, guides, and loves humanity. How do we know how to instruct and guide men? Here it is in its own words, and take it to heart.

This page is one of those, quite frequent, where the meaning of the text can be understood on two levels: the explicit translation above relates to the moral and emotional level, to the individual and human level. The Sage is patient whilst awaiting the ultimate blessings bestowed by the Way, because, one after another, he receives from it (material) support, (emotional) abundance, and a faithful and upright spirit (intellectual). And, as he has never forgotten the name of the Way, self-awareness gives him hope in the Way. It is in this sense that he guides humanity through his affections, and also through his examples.

Here is a paraphrase of this same page, giving the characters their philosophical meaning, that is to say, transposing the page onto the metaphysical plane:

The forms of Virtue: this is the only way to see the Way.

The Way is the eternal and immutable Totality: within it, one may conceive of images; it is eternal and immutable; within it, one may see countless beings; it is eternal and profound; within it, one may conceive of the essence, this essence being immutable and rigid. Within it there is continuity; its name has never passed away. It gives birth, direction and aspiration to all beings. How can it do all this? By itself.

Thus, humanity distinguishes within the Way (within creation) physical forms, individual living beings, and a general, eternal essence. The three conceptions that humanity can thus form of the Way correspond to the three planes on which it can conceive, and to the three situations in which (according to the first interpretation of the text) the Sage exercises patience. But whether it be the essence, whether it be the formal beings, whether it be the images, these are never anything but imperfect appearances. The *images* correspond to the material plane, and are the forms of the stream of creation; the *beings* correspond to the emotional plane, and are the individuals who animate the forms; the *essence* corresponds to the metaphysical plane, and is the totalised personality of the individuals, freed from forms. In reality, the Way can only be conceived as the reintegrated Personality, and consequently, *destroyed in favour of Unity.* This is why it is truly both in Being and in Non-Being, and this is why it remains incomprehensible to men, who are but infinitely divisible fragments of Being, and who remain below the conception of identical Non-Being.

XXII. – *Bent, to remain intact; straight, to be broken; destroyed, to be fulfilled; hidden, to be new. With few advantages, one preserves oneself; with many advantages, one is lost. The perfect man unites all into a single whole: he is the model for all men. He is not seen; yet he shines. He does not stir; yet he acts. He is not hasty; yet he has merits. He is not excessive; yet he endures. He is not agitated; that is why others do not agitate against him. Thus, from long ago, that which was bent remained intact. To speak thus is to teach the ignorant. That which is intact ascends to the Way.*

The first six hundred-line stanzas on this page are aphorisms that have become popular proverbs. Those who are bent, that is to say, who live unknown and modestly, run no danger; those, on the contrary, who raise their heads and are proud of themselves or their situation are broken; thus Tarquin's stroll through his poppy garden takes on an Eastern flavour. Likewise, those who are humble before the Way go to the Way: the others ignore it and turn away from it.

In the same vein, the Sage, whose mind is not cluttered with a thousand human notions, can be filled with the notion of the Way: his mind must be free to attain this understanding, and also, the Sage must modestly withdraw, so that his mind may always be fresh and ready to serve his asceticism; for, if the Sage does not withdraw, he busies himself, or is made to busy himself, with a thousand tasks whose sole purpose is transient and mediocre interests; and he is left, to attend to the Way, with nothing but a weary intellect and a mind burdened by a thousand useless cares.

The Sage's outward conduct must be in accordance with these precepts of his inner life. He must, in fact, since he is compelled to live, *live as little as possible*, that is to say, not enter into conflict, neither with others nor with himself; not to enter into conflict with others is to step aside (to make way for them); not to enter into conflict with oneself is to have no passions.

For the Sage, his light, his action, his merits, his ardour are internal; and he must show others an exterior that is precisely the opposite; thus he casts no shadow on anyone; and, being envied nor used by anyone, he can devote all his strength and all his mind to conforming to his destiny. And he inevitably attains it. Thus, all that seeks to be bent remains unharmed, and all that is unharmed attains the Way.

XXIII. – *He who speaks little acts as he pleases. He calls for the wind, but does not say which way it should blow. He calls for the rain, but does not say on which day it should fall. He knows to act in accordance with this: Heaven and Earth cannot last forever; are not men the same? Therefore, to follow the Way is to be at one with the Way*[12] *. To follow what is good is to be at one with what is good. To follow loss is to be at one with loss. To be at one with the Way is to gain the Way; to be at one with what is good is to gain what is good; to be at one with loss is to gain loss. To have little trust is to have no trust.*

This chapter points out the material benefit first, and then the moral benefit, of rare and thoughtful action. He who speaks much, even if he is wise, is often mistaken. Thus, the Sage who calls for the wind to blow from a certain direction and for rain on a certain day is more likely to be mistaken, and is therefore less wise than the Sage who simply calls for the wind and the rain. He who performs specific actions is therefore inferior to he who performs only general actions.

Moreover, it is true to say that he who performs general actions acts in accordance with Heaven and Earth; he who worries about details (the direction of the wind, the day of

[12] to assimilate it.

the rain) is mistaken, because he is no longer guided by general laws, and because he has – in his individual capacity – the pretension of commanding relativities. It is therefore right that he should be mistaken, and that he should lose the name of sage. For the Sage knows no laws[13] . And there are no laws for things that change.

Those, then, who act sparingly and thoughtfully are in harmony with the Way. But the Master emphasises this point: that it is enough to wish to follow the Way to be in harmony with it, and to desire it to attain it. Likewise, it is enough not to wish to follow it to be in league with loss. Herein lies the most striking consequence of this principle – which is universal, and which is, in any case, thoroughly Far Eastern – that intention is worth the deed, that is to say, that a deliberate thought is enough for a man to become better than a man.

XXIV. – *He who stands on tiptoe does not remain standing. He who stiffens his knees does not walk. He who looks does not always see clearly. He who possesses cannot always enjoy. He who reproaches does not always have merit. He who has the superfluous cannot always endure. This is speaking in accordance with the Way. All beings may be evil; so, where is he who has the Way?*

Everything that the Master, in the name of the Way, forbids, on the intellectual and metaphysical plane, is equally bad from a material point of view. Thus, just as pride serves only to point out the prince's victims, so too does standing on tiptoe cause a standing man to lose his balance. Just as hardness and stubbornness lead to blindness and error, so stiffening the knees prevents one from walking and moving forward. He who looks too much wears out his power of sight; only he who has his eyes closed truly sees; he who possesses much does not enjoy it, for he fears losing his wealth; only he is happy who possesses so little that he needs to spend all he has. Thus, he who criticises a mediocre action sometimes has so few merits that he himself, acting in identical circumstances, would have acted even more mediocrely. Such are the teachings of the Way. They are entirely contrary to man's passionate feelings. One might therefore wonder whether there is a man who possesses the Way in his heart. We see how much the highest Taoist doctrine favours a rule of daily practice.

XXV. – *Possessing the Thing enables one to do something beforehand; heaven and earth were born; now they are united, now they are Profound. The Thing (It) appears alone*[14]*, yet does not change. It goes everywhere, and never stops. It is fitting that It (the Thing) should be the origin of all mankind. I do not know its name; its nature is written as the Way. – Being immense, its name translates as: to be great. To be great translates as: to go everywhere. To go everywhere translates as: to cross. To cross translates as: to return. Thus the Way is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great; the King, too, is great. In the midst, there are therefore four great things, but the King alone is visible.*

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[13] Unchanging.

[14] The unnameable thing, the 'Neutral', prior to any gendered position.

Man obeys the Earth; the Earth obeys Heaven; Heaven obeys the Way; the Way obeys its Master[15] .

The Master indicates, in the most veiled and general terms—which have become proverbial—the modes of the organised formation of the Universe. Nothing comes into being from nothing; before this observation was made, there were Earth and Heaven, that is to say, *the Active* and the *Passive*, or the two manifestations of the primordial cause. – But before that, there was the Thing, 'It' (the Neutral), that is to say, Being-Non-Being. No one knows or understands it; It is the origin: one cannot grasp the origin from which one emerges until one has emerged from it. This is why Being-Non-Being is incomprehensible to men; when one wishes to speak of it, one writes its character, which bears the name of the Way.

The Way gives birth to the triad of magnitudes. These three magnitudes, affirmed and established by the Way, form the quaternary of realisation (here the science of numbers proclaims its unity and ubiquity). The first principle emerging from the infinite Way is the positive – activity – *Heaven*, which 'goes everywhere', that is to say, which permeates all things with its essence. The second principle is the negative – passivity or manifestation – *Earth*, whose influence *permeates* all things; all things are dependent on this influence. The third principle is synthetic creation, the 'Universal Man' – the *King* – whose function is *return*, that is to say, the function of man is to restore to creation, through continual asceticism, its original perfection, or to cause it *to return* and revert to its origin. Of the realised quaternary of magnitudes, Man alone is visible, and the actions of the four magnitudes are governed and reflected by the ascending hierarchy, which leads to the primordial Way, which obeys only itself.

This page contains the seeds of the entire science of the metaphysical *Way* of the Far East, as we have previously set out[16]. And we can also see that the doctrine of universal asceticism, through the divine ray contained within Man, is found in its entirety in Primitive Gnosis.

XXVI. – *The heavy has a light root. The perfection of subjects leads to the downfall of kings. The Sage prepares himself all day long; he does not separate the heavy from the light. Behold, it is said, the great are very happy; truly, men think this to be true; to rule as they see fit, kings say ten thousand 'yeses'. But their hearts treat all men lightly. Being light causes the great to fall. Being shaken brings down kings.*

We have seen it in the *I Ching*, we shall see it in the writings of Confucius, we see it today in the profound thought of the Taoist master: despite the appearance of an absolute autocracy enthroned at the summit of the hierarchy, the Yellow Spirit is a communist and anti-monarchical spirit. We shall see many traces of this elsewhere; this is the first. The tree, which is very heavy, has a small, light, invisible root:

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[15] It is hardly worth pointing out that the 'King' of Taoism is entirely identical to the 'Universal Man' of Kabbalah.
[16] *The Metaphysical Way*, Paris, 1936.

yet it is this that nourishes him, and without it, he could not exist. Thus, it is the common people who nourish the great, and who are the raison d'être of the public and visible authorities. The great tend to neglect the common people, forgetting that they exist only through them and for them. This leads to the downfall of the great. But when the people are wise and perfect, they know how to govern themselves and no longer need to be guided, advised or commanded. This is why the perfection of the subjects must lead to the disappearance of kings; this is also why the wise man, in his concern, never separates kings from the people.

One can certainly – and many scholars and courtiers did so – derive a metaphysical meaning from this passage. But one must be certain that Laozi, as an absolute consequence of his philosophical system, saw the happiness of peoples in their freedom and self-government, and that he offered them this freedom only as a reward, and also as an inevitable corollary of the perfection they were to acquire by following his teachings.

XXVII. – *The upright man acts without causing harm, speaks without lying, and explains without exaggeration; whereas the man who knows how to close, however strong he may be, does not know how to open, and the man who knows how to bind does not know how to untie. The perfect man is always skilled at saving men. If there are no men, he is skilled at saving all beings. If there are no beings, his skill nonetheless covers him with splendour. Such are upright men. If an unrighteous man is the master, all men are unrighteous. Not to honour one's master is not to love prosperity. The Sages, already serious and enlightened, desire to be deeper and more subtle.*

XXVIII. – *He who knows himself to be strong yet acts with kindness is the foremost of all men. To him who is the foremost of all men, constant virtue is never lacking; it will then pass on to his children. He who knows himself to be brilliant yet keeps himself obscure is the model for all men. To him who is the model for all men, his constant virtue will not fail; it will return to him without end. He who knows himself to be learned yet keeps his lips sealed is the foremost of all men. To him who is the foremost of all men, his constant virtue suffices everywhere: it shall return to the very end of the race. When the end is exhausted, it returns to his remembrance. Thus acts the perfect man; thus he acts well and for a long time. These great laws are not easy.*

These two pages explain the role of the perfect man in this world, and the benefits he derives from it for himself and for the race. The role of the wise man consists entirely of solidarity (which is translated in the West as 'reciprocal altruism'). It should be noted that this solidarity is in accordance with natural law, and must be instinctive and also expressed chiefly through negative acts (devoid of violence and outward display; this is why the text says that he who closes does not know how to open, and that he who chains does not know how to unchain). Through the exercise of this natural solidarity *and the golden mean*, Man can save all men, all beings; and this is what the wise strive for as they seek ever to progress. But also, what a result, even a personal one, of such a renunciation of one's personality! The gentleness of the powerful, the obscurity of the illustrious, the silence of the Wise, when they are perpetual and voluntary, are the source of the most constant virtue and perfect happiness. Virtue and happiness extend to the children of the Wise, to his entire lineage,

extend back to his ancestors, and immortalise his deeds. And thus, *virtue* and *happiness* uniting the whole race (and all of Humanity) in a single perfection, the whole of humanity ascends to the Way and conforms to it.

XXIX. – *Everyone wants to rule over all men. I, however, see that no one can: the minds of all men lack the capacity for it. To strive for it is to go astray; to desire it is to be defeated. Indeed, amongst all beings, some lead, others follow; some envy, others renounce; some are strong, others are weak; some allow themselves to be led, others lead. Thus the perfect man renounces greatness, renounces humanity, renounces everything.*

In a very vague and broad form, open to all possible interpretations, this is a condemnation of autocracy and of any monarchical system. Commentators are quite explicit in their paraphrases, which may be summarised as follows: society is a sum of individuals; these individuals each possess (contrary to the principles of the Way) a particular will and energy; these wills and energies do not add up, for they do not agree; they are merely concurrent in time and place. Now, monarchy, or the rule of a single individual, is an attempt to totalise these wills and direct them towards the same goal: this is an impossible task; it is even an abnormal one, as long as society is composed of individuals: society is a series of individual energies, and, as such, cannot be directed by a single individual.

To make autocracy possible, one must eliminate the individuality of energies and replace it with a collective energy; on that day, there will no longer be individuals, but a human whole, which is 'Human Unity'. Only then will the rule of a single entity be possible. But what will this *'One'* be? It will not be a man, since all humanity will then have become a unity; nor will it be a fallible being, since, having attained the perfection of Unity, humanity will no longer need to be governed by force and command, and will conform of its own accord to the supreme Reason. This *One* will therefore be the *Way*, which is, by definition, the master who does not command.

Thus autocracy becomes materially possible only from the day it is logically unnecessary. Let us recognise that there exists, in no philosophical system, a more triumphant demonstration of the futility of government by a single individual.

XXX. – *Leaders enlightened by the Way do not resort to the horrors of military violence: they have the loyalty of their people on their side; the wicked have long since been born: later, the great scales will weigh them. Certainly, there are cruel years; but let men only be upright; then they have no need to resort to violence. Truly they do not save themselves; truly they do not strike; truly they do not vex; truly they do not sin; truly they are not violent. Though without the Way, they acted thus already; but, in the dawn of ages, there was no Way for them.*

This page is entirely exoteric and requires no paraphrase: it describes the conduct of the Sages who, in the earliest times, were leaders of

peoples, that is to say, not leaders, but advisers whom the peoples chose for themselves, and whose counsel they freely sought and followed.

But the final sentence of this page must be carefully preserved. Primitive men acted in accordance with the Way without knowing it, because, being primitive and adherents of natural law alone, there was no Way for them. But from the day they knew there was a Way, and sought to follow it, each in their own way, then they lost it, by the very fact that they pursued it with their individuality.

XXXI. – *Leaders whom the Way assists do not flaunt their talents. People may be wicked; yet here is the Way; there is no place where it is not. Upright men revere the left; those who rely on armies revere the right. When one has armies, one must not reveal their strength; no, one must not reveal one's strength: what is not advantageous, one must not do. – Speech and wisdom are to be preferred above all else. Good deeds take the left; evil deeds take the right. Merciful leaders take the left; proud leaders take the right. Their words can bring death everywhere. They kill a great multitude of men, thinking that these men are not of their own blood. But Heaven will strike them down in the same way, and because they have brought death everywhere.*

Herein lies the critique and the indication of the fate of those who employ armies and violence to establish their power and achieve their ends. – The text is too clear in itself to require explanation. It should be noted that Chinese commentators draw from this all possible political consequences.

XXXII. – *The Way surely has no name. Weak as little leaves, men dare not act on their own. In the future, let kings be attentive and careful to see whether, for all beings, it is spoken truly. Heaven and earth united, the dew falls gently. The people are not enlightened, yet they have desires. The new law has a name; this name already has a character. It is known enough; it is not practised enough. One aspect of the Way remains among all men. They act thus, like the course of all rivers, which flow to the sea.*

This page indicates the result of the union of heaven and earth: the dew falls; this is the metaphysical manifestation; it is secretion and copulation. This dogma, which is one of the principal tenets of Tibetan rites, is, in Taoism, a consequence of secondary importance, like all contingencies. With the *realisation*, which the generative symbolism encapsulates, one aspect of the Way descends among men; it is the *reflection* of the true Way that only men see, and through which they know of the existence of the ineffable Way, towards which, moreover, they are irresistibly drawn, like rivers towards the sea.

XXXIII. – *He who knows men is wise; he knows with clarity. Thus, he who can know men possesses the strength by which one may be powerful. He who knows how to restrain himself is rich; he who acts with strength has willpower. He who does not scatter himself endures; he who dies and is not forgotten is immortal.*

In a new form, this page reiterates the law most dear to the Master, which is the very foundation of his system and which has already been discussed on page XXIII.

XXXIV. – *Behold, the Way extends both to the right and to the left; it gives birth to all beings and leaves none behind; it possesses the means to merit, yet does not claim its name. It loves and nurtures all beings; yet it does not seek to be their master. Usually, men do not wish to act in this way, and so it is fitting that their name should be obscure. The ten thousand beings come to the Way, and it does not wish to be their master; it is therefore fitting that its name should be great. This is why the perfect man does not act, and is great; this is why he can perform great deeds.*

The metaphysical manner in which the Way acts to draw beings to itself, to influence them and to bestow upon them the happiness that corresponds to human fulfilment, is offered as a model to men so that they may conform their individual conduct to it, thereby gaining merit to draw nearer to the Way. This is 'Freedom' on the political plane (the Way loves beings, without wishing to be their master). It is also, and above all, Solidarity on the mystical and divine plane (the Way forgets no being and does not mark its name). It is from this that its original perfection springs, and the wise man becomes perfect only by imitating it to the extent that is proper to him.

XXXV. – *The perfect man presents the image of the Way: all men come to him; they come, and never cease to come. Peace reigns everywhere; one gladly hears this pleasant word. For strangers, silence suffices; for others, the Way speaks through his mouth. He who speaks quickly speaks without fruit. One looks at the Way and does not see it clearly. One listens to it and does not hear it clearly. One wishes to imitate it, yet does not observe it closely enough.*

This page contains a twofold recommendation. The first is to remain silent in the presence of strangers (identical to those whom the early Christians called Gentiles): we shall see how strictly this rule was observed in the constitution of the college of Sages and their pupils, and in the transmission, more or less restricted, of the doctrine.

The second recommendation is this warning that, whatever we do, we shall never attain the Way. To comply with it, we must strive to attain it; but our human condition does not allow us to identify with it. That is why we must not be discouraged by imperfections or failures for which we are not responsible.

XXXVI. – *Will the upright man diminish? Certainly, the Way enables him to grow. Will he be weary? Certainly, it gives him strength. Does he wish to rise in rank? Certainly, it grants him the title. Does he wish to gather? Certainly, it brings about the gathering. It does this for the few who are enlightened. The weak become strong; the weary become alert. The fish cannot leave the depths of the rivers. Thus the empire of itself attains perfection; it governs men without thinking of its own interest.*

Here is a brief list of the benefits that the Way bestows upon those who strive to follow it naturally: the first is self-improvement; the second

is power; the third is wisdom; the fourth is de-individualisation (or the uniting of many parts into a whole). Once this result is achieved, man has made every effort for the Way that his condition allows him to make. And, in return, just as a fish cannot leave the depths of the rivers, so man cannot leave the Way; therefore, he remains within it naturally and without striving. In this case, the empire is at the highest degree of perfection: it governs itself within the community of its citizens, without regard to the interests of ruling individuals, whose role is now illusory and ended.

XXXIII. – *The Way appears not to act; yet it is never without action. In the future, let kings keep it strictly, and the ten thousand beings will transform themselves. Transformed, they may still wish to act, but they will be spared from doing so. For the Way has no name, yet it is powerful. Let men aspire to unity, but have no desires. No desires: that is peace. Then men will be in Reason.*

This is the general, concluding formula of the Treatise on *the Tao*, by which the Master reaffirms the quintessence of Will and Existence in the immovable Non-Being. And, following the example of the Immobile Non-Being, let men refrain from desires; thus they will have no passions; they will not commit individual acts to satisfy them; thus they will be at peace and will identify with their destinies.

CHAPTER IV

The *Te*

The second sacred book of Taoism forms, together with the first, a complete whole; yet it is just as distinct from it as an application may be distinct from its principle.

Laozi, however, combined these two books into a single treatise, or, as we say in China, a single **king**; for he rightly believed that the first book would be of no use unless the reader applied the second; and he also knew that the second would only be intelligible and properly applied once the first had been thoroughly absorbed and understood. It was to clearly specify this mutual necessity that he brought the two books together under a single title.

But what is rational in China, where indeed the understanding of *the Tao* first and the *Te* second can give rise to a general political direction, and even to a rule of daily conduct for individuals, becomes anomalous after the translation of the text into the languages of the West, that country where the Sages, the Initiates and the Philosophers are regarded as useless outside of speculation, and as wholly incapable of government. The *Tao* and the *Te* must be united in nations where they can be put into practice; they must be separated, as they are by their very nature, in countries where they are studied solely for asceticism, whether personal or collective, and where they come up against the utter impossibility of realisation.

This, we believe, is what the early translators of Taoist texts—Messrs Pauthier, de Rémusat, Julien, and even the most recent, Mr Alexandre Ular—failed to grasp fully; for whilst he made excellent use of his predecessors' work, he could not and did not grasp the reason for the distinctions or combinations they had made.

As readers of **The Metaphysical Way** will have realised, the first book, **The* Tao***, the 'Way', is the rational explanation of the cosmogonic and metaphysical problems contained in the texts of the primordial Yellow tradition, and especially in the **Yi Jing**: the Way – which is Laozi's *Tao* – is precisely the symbolic helical cycle that 'creation' (to use Western terminology) ascends throughout the 'day of Brahma'; it is the series of changes in *the I Ching*, including the final change, the Transformation, which concludes and crowns creation. There is nothing human here, in the sense that there is nothing that applies exclusively to man. It is the Way, with its immutable and eternal movement, along which, in a movement of their own, contingencies (matter, life, thought, force, and, amongst other things, humanity) wind themselves, and

within which, upon entering, these contingencies are destroyed, insofar as they are formal, to become nothing more than fragmentary participants in the absolute.

Laozi's *Te* is the book of reason, according to which humankind, as we know it today, may organise its ideas, its means, and even its conduct, provided it has come to know the *Tao*, and knows where it is directed by the will of Heaven, and how it may, temporarily and through merit, conform to this will, and prepare itself to receive its effects.

Thus, if I may venture to use a wild but decisive metaphor, the *Te* is the application of *the Tao* to the human being on Earth. *Te* therefore possesses none of the metaphysical characteristics of *the Tao*; it possesses all the rational characteristics of an eternal and intangible principle which, for the sake of finite beings, is reduced to contingencies and confined within formal limits.

We can thus see how *Te* is distinct from *the Tao*, and how one can only attain *Te* through the *Tao*. Those who, without knowing the *Tao*, were to attempt to conform to *Te*, would merely produce a fleeting work and wear themselves out in vain; they would never achieve anything more than the empty semblance of their ideal. It is therefore not surprising that, whilst being a book of rational practice, the *Te* bears the mark of its heavenly origin and is constantly shrouded in a metaphysical atmosphere. It is in this that Laozi's reason differs from Confucius's morality. These two men, the latter of whom was merely a scholar, both sought to lay down the rules for the happiness that humanity could attain; Confucius, through the observation of men and the analytical psychology of individuals, ascends to this happiness. Laozi, from the unbreakable laws of metaphysics, descends to it. Thus, these two minds, even when they spoke to one another, never met. They seemed to occupy the same point in space, relative to a horizontal plane; but on the vertical (this comparison, borrowed from descriptive geometry, is as accurate as a comparison can be), Confucius stood at the foot of the mountain, contemplating its inaccessible summit, towards which he cried out his desire; Laozi was on the summit, from where he cast his gaze down upon the earth, to which he did not deign to descend, but which he instructed with his divine counsel.

And it is in the very title of the second book, and in its concrete meaning, that we can perceive its distinction from the *Tao*; for Laozi was no less subtle than profound, beneath his naive appearances; and here lies one of the most singular proofs of this subtlety. The character *Te* signifies Virtue, or Righteousness, that is to say, Virtue through Logic and Reason. But, in the concrete sense of the term, righteousness is the 'straight line'; it is, moreover, what enabled Mr Alexandre Ular, who does not paraphrase the profound meaning of the characters and frequently confines himself to the outer shell of the hidden and unknown fruit, to title his translation: *The Book of the Way and the Straight Line*. Let us understand how the concrete meaning of the character *Te* is the precise symbol of the 'earthbound' *Tao*.

May our readers refer to the metaphysical diagram in which we have outlined the Taoist Cycle in a few lines, and to the reasoning by which we have established: 1° that this universal cycle was a helix with definable elements, save for one; 2° that, within the fictitious cylinder of the Celestial Will, the vital circle of any given humanity was the circle, tangent at any point on the

, and perpendicular to the pitch of the helix, taken at that point on the lateral surface of the cylinder.

We have explained how this cylindrical diagram becomes conical at the metaphysical infinity[1], and how the apex of this cone at the metaphysical infinity was precisely the Celestial Will, and the metaphysical locus of *Nirvana*. The evolving spiral on the cylinder – and at infinity on the cone – represents the *Tao*, or the transformative path. Let us project all this onto that vital human circle which we have just drawn inside the fictitious cylinder, under the conditions we have just described, and which correspond to the metaphysical conditions governing human life. The Celestial Will is projected at the centre of the circle; the spiral is projected as a diameter, which is the diameter drawn from the point common to the helix and the circumference. This diameter, which is the image of the ascending spiral during life, has two superhuman points: the point belonging to the helix of *the Tao*, and the point which is the projection of the Will of Heaven. And this diameter is a *straight line*. Therefore – and the graphic symbol necessarily indicates this – the man who wishes to follow the teachings of *the Tao* must, during his life, follow a *straight line*, that is to say, obey *Righteousness* and practise Virtue. For, through the effect of the ideograms, the straight line, Righteousness and Virtue are represented by a single character, which is *Te*.

If one reflects deeply on this symbol, so simple, so striking, yet containing the most complete of rational mysteries, and if one constantly keeps in mind the result of these reflections, Laozi's text on *Te* will be illuminated by the brightest light, and it will suffice, to understand it, and even to practise it (at least as far as the tumultuous contingencies of the white race permit), to have a few very brief commentaries, which we shall append to the text of each of the Master's pages.

I. – *Great virtue is not virtue; but to be so, this is virtue. Mediocre virtue is not the absence of virtue; but to be so, this is virtue departing. Great virtue does not manifest itself, because it does not wish to manifest itself; mediocre virtue manifests itself because it wishes to manifest itself. Then man manifests great compassion (humanity), without realising it; then he manifests great fairness, and is keen to realise it; then he manifests great generosity (solidarity and propriety), but it serves him no purpose, and brings relief to others. – When the Way is lost, he retains virtue; when virtue is lost, he retains compassion; when compassion is lost, he retains fairness; when fairness is lost, he retains the rites (generosity, solidarity, propriety). This, however small, is truly the beginning of evil. This is what men who know the Way have long known; they were the first to know it. Thus the Wise Man attaches himself everywhere to the Absolute, nowhere to the contingent; he remains in the principle, and turns away from the effect. He neglects this thing and preserves that one.*

Virtue, which is Righteousness, does not in itself belong to the realm of man; he may approach it indefinitely without ever attaining it, so long as he remains human: therein lies his

[1] In contrast to mathematical infinity, beyond which the cone unfolds into inverted layers.

best destiny. But if he possesses all the Righteousness that a man is capable of possessing, he shares in the same merits as those who, no longer being men, can possess and do possess the totality of Righteousness. Moreover, this acquisition and possession are the unmistakable omens of the attainment of Righteousness, within the planes or cycles of revolution that essentially comprise it.

Likewise, and conversely (that which is above is like that which is below, but in the opposite sense), he who is content with mediocre Righteousness and makes no effort to increase it is not without Righteousness; but he has no merit of Righteousness, and he descends towards the absence of Righteousness. He who does not advance retreats.

The characteristic of Righteousness is not to manifest itself and not to wish to manifest itself. The mere desire to display or to wish to spread one's righteousness loses Righteousness. It appears to men only through its negative qualities, and through the exclusion of all acts that do not involve righteousness. Thus the doctrine of conscious and voluntary non-action applies to the conduct of individuals. – As an immediate consequence, Righteousness that manifests itself knowingly, through a series of deliberate acts, is mediocre righteousness, that is to say, the beginning of the absence of all righteousness.

Apart from Righteousness, the wise man manifests, by the very fact of his wisdom, compassion, which is goodness, charity, and selfless altruism; and he manifests it unconsciously, as a mechanical and necessary emanation of his prior virtue.

Apart from this altruism, he manifests great justice; but he can only attach himself to it by realising what he is doing, justice being a reflective and comparative concept; here, therefore, he wills its manifestation. – Apart from justice, he manifests generosity or solidarity; and here lies the beginning of evil, for the manifestation is willed, and calls forth a series of manifestations.

Thus, one may arrange the various states of the Sage's mind in this descending order: Righteousness, which does not manifest itself and does not wish to manifest itself; Humanity, which manifests itself without one wishing to manifest it; Justice, which manifests itself because one wishes to manifest it; Solidarity, which manifests itself, which one wishes to manifest, and which, by its very definition, demands that others manifest it reciprocally amongst themselves. This is why, though still praiseworthy, Solidarity—which is the beginning of reciprocal human actions—is the beginning of evil.

Thus, to abide in the Way – which, on Earth, is Righteousness – the Wise One clings to the principle of action alone and detaches himself from all actions, considering only the cause and refusing to consider the effect.

II. – *He who maintains righteousness attains unity or perfection. Heaven, in its perfection, possesses purity. Earth, in its perfection, possesses peace. The soul, in its perfection, possesses supernatural knowledge. Emptiness, in its perfection, possesses fullness. The ten thousand beings, in their perfection, have birth (life). Kings, in their perfection, have upright men. Now, all this is precisely unity. If heaven were not in purity, it would tremble at its ruin. If the earth were not in peace, it would tremble at its*

collapse. If the soul were not in supernatural knowledge, it would tremble at its disappearance. If the void were not in fullness, it would tremble at its annihilation. If the ten thousand beings were not alive, they would tremble at their end. If kings and great men were not upright, they would tremble at their overthrow. That is why the great regard money (which is false) as the remedy for evil. Princes have the lowly as their helpers, and thus kings act without hypocrisy. Surely it is money that makes thieves, is it not? What is just is not the Just. Who, then, does not wish for happiness, like a diamond, to fall from the sky upon him like pebbles?

Righteousness brings perfection, which is unity; and thus the rational 'Way' is the means to the metaphysical 'Way', and the human Way harmonises with the universal Way. For, as we have seen, Unity is the beginning and the end of the Way.

But what is this Righteousness which is the sign of the rational Way? This Righteousness consists precisely in the fact that every thing possesses, essentially and completely, the quality that befits it, and thus fulfils the purpose set before it. Thus Rectitude is attained by the heavens when they possess the purity for which they were made; by the earth, when it possesses peace, in moral and material stability; by the soul, when it possesses supernatural knowledge; by beings, when they possess life, and so on and so forth: all this is Unity.

Now, if these qualities of unity (which are aspects of Unity in relation to all these things) did not fulfil these things, they would be destroyed by the very fact of their non-conformity to the Way, and consequently, by their general uselessness. Thus, and to speak metaphysically, objective beings exist only so that they may manifest within themselves the attributes of the subjective. That is to say, Heaven exists only to make purity understood; the earth, only to make stability understood; beings, only to make Life understood, etc., which are aspects of Unity. All these qualities are of essential necessity, like Unity itself; but the concrete things in which they manifest themselves are of only relative necessity.

This proposition, which is almost a metaphysical axiom, takes on a singular poignancy when applied to the political sphere, as the Master and his followers were careful not to fail to do.

Sovereigns, indeed, are meant to make the social order, if not harmonious, at least bearable; but, applying impeccable metaphysical reasoning to them, we see that sovereigns are necessary only insofar as there are beings to be organised into society. Social order gives rise to sovereigns; yet, from that very moment, it becomes apparent that kings are made for nations, and not nations for kings. A race remains a de facto entity: the sovereign of that race is an organising and moderating mechanism, which is not of essential necessity, but of a secondary and temporary necessity, just like his work itself. Once the work is done, the organ becomes useless and must be abolished. For, even if the sovereign fulfils his office well, he must not be retained when he no longer serves any purpose. Thus the Master says that what is just is not the Just. The Just is not an act to

organise and control justice; the Just is the state, perfect enough to require, on the contrary, no act of justice, nor the existence of any enforcer of justice.

It is by following these precepts that happiness, which is today as rare as a diamond, will become as common as pebbles on the path.

III. – *The circle: that is the movement of the Way; let the weak make use of it. Men and things are born. Once born, they disappear.*

As far as humanity is concerned, the Way has become Righteousness, and the evolving left-hand surface has become a plane: this is why the apparent movement of the Way, on earth, is a circle. It is upon this circle and within it that human weakness must move. It is said to be weak, since the movement remains flat and has no upward force. From this movement on a horizontal plane, the action of Righteousness forms a straight line.

This straight line begins at birth and ends with the passing of living beings. These, moreover, do not die, but they disappear in relation to the plane of human Righteousness.

IV. – *The true Sages understand the Way; they immediately act in accordance with it. The middle Sages understand the Way; they reflect upon it with reverence. The lesser Sages understand the Way; they reflect upon it with friendliness. But they do not reflect upon it enough, and they speak of it too often to follow it. He who knows the Way is like a fragrance. He who ascends to the Way finds it as easy as descending. He who falls short of the Way is like nothingness. Great virtue is like an abyss. Great purity is like order. Perfect virtue is as if without end. Strong virtue is like boundless growth. The Sage, simple and upright, is as strong as the multitudes. He is a great square with no corners. He is a great root with no end. He is a great voice with no sound. He is a great image with no shadow. The Way shines forth by its very name: he who walks the Way walks in omnipotence.*

The Sages who are touched and filled by Righteousness—that is to say, who direct all their human thoughts towards the inhuman Way—fall into three categories, corresponding to the three planes of the occult. The Initiates become one with the Way and its movement: they are perfect. The Sages think continually and respectfully of the Way, as of the Ancestor who has died (and is therefore eternally alive); their perfection is lacking in that they believe in their own movement, uncoordinated with that of the Way. The learned think sympathetically of the Way, as of some friend who is alive, that is to say, they bear it the same affection as for a contingency; and they possess nothing of perfection, since they are ignorant of the essential nature of the Way; such people speak too much to think deeply, for silence is the only eloquence worthy of the Way and of the followers of the Way. He who knows the Way is like a fragrance, that is to say, like that which is most real and most immaterial in the world, for everyone knows the fragrance, yet no one has seen or touched it. He who ascends to the Way, possessing the qualities of the Sage just compared to perfume, acts as though he were descending, for his non-will to act keeps him motionless between the active ascent and

the active descent, and he possesses all the ease of one who knowingly obeys the essential nature of Heaven. He who strays from the Way is like nothingness, for, outside the Way, no one has a reason for being, and contingency that does not relate to the movement of the Way is like an effect without a cause. Great virtue is like an abyss, that is to say, unfathomable, even to the man who possesses it. Perfection is as if without end, that is to say, it is infinite; great virtue – or human virtue – is like indefinite growth, that is to say, it perfects itself daily by increasing, but it will never be infinite perfection, since something can always be added to it.

Finally, we see that the Sage, whose worth represents that of the multitudes, gradually loses his particularities; that he retains his form, but loses the determinations of his form; that he pushes his limits back to infinity, as would a square without corners, an endless root, a voice without sound, an image without shadow, and so on. Now, he who pushes back his limits tends to lose his form, and thus to merge with the Way, from which he acquires, through his de-individualisation, impersonal omnipotence.

V. – *The Way produced One. One produced Two, Two produced Three. Three produced the ten thousand beings. All beings possess the* Am *principle enveloping the* Duong *principle. In truth, the spirit that unites these two principles brings balance. Men who are ignorant of this are isolated and rootless. King Cong*[2] *approved of this. It is said that men who seize something nevertheless have an advantage: perhaps they retain what they have seized. The common folk act in this way. But we say this: the violent have no means of attaining a happy Death. Let fathers teach this to their children.*

This page is the law of 'Creation', that is to say, the law of the transformations of beings, flowing, by the will of Heaven, in the stream of forms. We ask the reader to refer, for details, to the texts of the *Metaphysical Way*.

But the sublime summary of this page is special in that it highlights the ternary principle, which, in the traditions of all humanity, presides over creative manifestations. It must therefore be brought to light as the document best suited to determining the universal synthesis regarding cosmogonic truth.

But we also emphasise the clarity with which this ternary principle is, by the Master, confined to the realm of manifestation, and does not affect the purely abstract realm. Western traditions and revelations apply this ternary principle to the divine Essence itself and, thereby arriving at an unintelligible result, they necessarily conclude with what they call: the 'Mystery of the Trinity', a mystery for which no resolution is to be found anywhere. The Yellow Tradition, on the contrary, if it were to present us with a mystery, would present us with the mystery of Unity, warning us that this axiom only appears mysterious to us because our fragmented human condition resists the comprehension of the sole existing Unity; and thus

[2] A legendary entity representing the multitude of sages.

the Being-Non-Being, identical to itself, appears misty to us, though we feel it profoundly, necessarily Alone. To illuminate this obscurity, which is personal to us, the primordial Tradition puts forward the ternary principle, taking care, however, to separate it reverently from the One and Total Essence, and gives us this ternary principle as an elucidation. Thus, and more accurately, the Trinity is no longer a mystery, but rather an explanation. And, provided we are not compelled – by some device or other – to apply this tripartition to the indivisible Unity, it does indeed become a true light. Let us accustom ourselves to regarding it as such.

The Way, which is the modifying and transforming mechanism, the expression of the will of Heaven (Being-Non-Being), produced One. One, or the first manifestation, is the active principle of the celestial will, which, for brevity's sake, is sometimes called Heaven (*Thien*).

One produced Two, which is the passive principle, the mother of all things, as the first page of *the Tao* states. It has been explained, in fact, how the mere affirmation of the active principle determines the passive principle.

Two produced Three. The union of One and Two consists precisely in Three, which is the manifestation of the Will of Heaven in the series of changes.

Three produced the ten thousand beings; that is to say, the flow of beings in the stream of forms (or, in Western terms, creation) is the immediate tangible result of the conceptual act of the union of One and Two, an act which constitutes Three.

The condition of changes is evolution, that is to say, movement; but the condition of every change is to be in accordance with the Way, that is to say, beneficial and rational; this is why the mind, which rationally unites the action of the two principles, brings about balance, which is the original Righteousness, and not reflected by an action.

Such is the mechanism of creation arising from Unity, through the explanatory medium of the triad.

As regards Righteousness and human life, it is fitting that the benefits conferred upon the human condition by the process of evolution should be acquired solely through the natural course of things, and not through the violent efforts of individuals. And that which is acquired outside of normality—that is to say, outside of voluntary acquiescence to the movement of the Way and to Righteousness—is of no use, despite appearances; that is to say, what seems advantageous to man during his life following such an acquisition loses all its value upon passing to the higher plane and as soon as the human plane ceases to exist. This is why the Master says: 'The violent do not prepare themselves for the Happy Death'. This mystery of the Happy Death will be discussed at length elsewhere[3] .

[3] See Appendix II of this edition: *The Sage's Farewell*, reproduced from the journal *La Voie*, issue of 15 December 1905.

VI. – *Men who are, in fact, very gentle, command and become very strong. He who commands enters the space between the columns, where nothing belongs to him. We therefore understand that commanding is a great advantage. We teach without speaking, we arrive without commanding, and this is a great advantage: few men are capable of this.*

It is through gentleness – that is to say, through silence and inaction, or rather through the concentration of energy – that man comes to command nature and his fellow men. Thus, he dominates without possessing any of the traits or making any of the gestures of a dominator. Yet he who, without violence (as stated on the previous page), achieves such a result, is at home everywhere: in his own house, in the houses of others (where nothing belongs to him), and even where there is no house (in the space between the columns). On a metaphysical level, this means that the immaterial will permeates material action and force. This is, indeed, a great advantage. In accordance with this precept, the Sage must know how to teach without speaking and to govern without commanding: this is the influence of the example set by one who conforms to the silent and all-powerful Way.

VII. – *The reputation of learning brings one closer to goodness; knowledge of learning increases goodness. Winning and losing both admit of misfortune. One must therefore, undoubtedly, let go of what one loves most. He who possesses much will lose much. And yet one says one never has enough. One has worked enough, and yet one says one has not worked enough. Thus one goes far and for a long time.*

VIII. – *The great human citadel lacks a rampart; and one cannot close the breach. The Wise Man has a great advantage: he has no need to implore. Rightly, there is a way to accomplish; wrongly, one must refrain. Movement triumphs over cold; stillness triumphs over heat. Purity and peace make men upright.*

The text of these two chapters has not survived intact; it concerns the renunciation of the qualities of the species, qualities which, moreover, are insufficient and always present a breach. But it is better to refrain from any commentary on pages known not to be explicit, which Chinese philosophers even consider to have been entirely reworked, whose certain terms remain almost untranslatable in the Taoist spirit, and which have given rise to multiple interpretations and endless controversies.

IX. – *When men follow the Way, the traces of violent men are few*[4] *. When men do not follow the Way, restraining them provokes their anger. It is no great crime to have aspirations; it is no great fault to know too little; it is no great oddity to desire to acquire. He who knows he has enough has enough.*

[4] Violent men are often compared to horses, whose nature is described in the text.

Herein lies the political consequence of Righteousness: when men conform to it, the empire is at peace (for violent men are also found in armies and military affairs); when men do not conform to it, gentleness has no further role to play; violence is exercised by the violent, and even amongst themselves.

The following precept is very subtle: the aspiration to feel, to know, to possess, is not a great fault, or rather, a great mediocrity, for it is understood that these aspirations are natural to men such as we are. But what would be a fault would be to yield to these aspirations towards mediocre goals, and to conduct ourselves as though we had yielded to them. That is why the Master says that, despite these innate desires, we must declare ourselves satisfied, and that, by dint of wanting to be satisfied, we shall be truly satisfied.

X. – *Without leaving his home, the Sage knows all men; he knows that they are not happy. He knows the Way of Heaven; though far away, he knows the smallest things. Thus, the Sage does not walk, yet arrives; does not see things, yet knows their names; does not work, yet produces.*

The Sage does not leave his home, that is to say, he does not allow himself to be distracted from his thoughts, nor does he let his feelings spill out beyond his heart. Yet he knows all men, and, knowing that they act differently, he knows that they are unhappy. Since he knows the Way, though he may be removed from the ordinary concerns of humanity, he knows them in detail, without however taking part in them. He can therefore benefit from his knowledge of things, without having to suffer the influence that these things would have on him, were he to concern himself with them directly, and other than in their cause. Thus, he attains the goal, because he knows the causes, and without needing to make use of the usual, indirect means. His reason arrives at the light, without his heart having beaten, and because it has not beaten. His mind attains abstract knowledge, without having seen the concrete, and because he has not seen it. His intellect produces the results of the first cause, without having scrutinised the secondary causes, and because he has not scrutinised them.

XI. – *He who studies for a day grows; he who follows the Way for a day progresses. He progresses and progresses still, and so on until he acts no more. Yet, even as he acts no more, he is not without action. And so he cares for mankind and preserves them from calamities; for sometimes calamities are near, and mankind are scarcely able to preserve themselves from them.*

This page, beneath its seemingly naive appearance, conceals the promise of the immortal self, based on the metaphysical truth of the universal Way and the will of Heaven. Studying leads to the Way; following the Way leads to progress, since the Way is an ascending spiral; and this progress is boundless and lasts indefinitely, just as the progression of the spiral itself lasts.

In general terms, this truth is expressed as follows: the Sage who follows the Way comes to a state of non-action; yet non-action is not the same as inaction; for voluntary non-action is an action; it is simply an action that is concentrated, internalised, and powerful, drawing upon all the

forces which it has not projected outside the personality, nor expended in manifestation.

From the perspective of the personality, whether superhuman or human, this truth is expressed as follows: the Sage who follows the Way and is animated by the Way progresses until his death; but for him, death is not a cessation of action; after death, the personality continues to act in accordance with the Way, above the human plane and in parallel with it. And even the acts of this superhuman personality are not indifferent or useless to humanity, which this personality once traversed; the wills to act or not to act that animate the superhuman personality have a reflexive effect on men, whom they beneficially preserve from such troubles or such misfortunes, from which the virtue of the merely human personality could not preserve them. Thus all efforts are beneficial to all; and here we find the Alexandrian and Gnostic doctrine of the asceticism of the sub-multiples through the wills, labours and even sufferings of the beings superior to them. We may apply this text to the human condition, in which our wills and our actions may be beneficial to the beings who are our personal sub-multiples. This is the link between life and death, and beyond life and death, which the theosophical doctrines point out so excellently.

XII. – *The Sage has no particular affections; the hundred families are his affections. To those who are good, he says, I am good; to those who are not good, I am good all the same. That is true goodness. To those who are sincere, I am sincere; to those who are not sincere, I am sincere all the same. That is true sincerity. The Sage lives amongst men and weighs the generations on the scales of his heart. The hundred families have him in their eyes and ears; he is the universal father and model.*

Herein lies the rule of universal altruism: the Sage knows neither love nor hatred, which are special feelings for particular individuals; but he knows selfless and universal affection for the whole human race. This affection is a reasoned will, and is not a passionate feeling. Thus the Sage behaves in the same way towards all men, whoever they may be; he is good and honest towards all men, even the wicked and dishonest; for he is so because the Way commands him to be so, for his own sake and independently of others; he must therefore love, aid and edify all others, regardless of their virtues or vices: it is in this that the Sage's altruism differs from the charity of the ignorant, or the mutuality of the egoist. Thus, all men turn to him, and look upon him and listen to him as if he were their father.

XIII. – *For every child born, eight die. Ten births are predicted, yet there are only three; men bring children into the world; at the slightest touch, they are dead. Thus ten are born, yet only three remain. Why this evil? Because today men desire too much to possess, to live, and to produce. He who listens attentively to the Way can create and live; walking his path, he need not turn aside from the tiger. He who goes to war and lacks sufficient defences, in the blink of an eye knows not where to hide, dies and cannot be saved. Against the Sage, the tiger cannot use*

its claws; the soldier cannot break the point of his sword. Why? By following the Way, the Sage who is on earth cannot die.

Of course, this is not a matter of human, material or animal life and death; it concerns the man who follows the Way and lives usefully, and the man who does not follow the Way and who moves no more than a corpse, or whose movements are useless (that is to say, who, through a lack of rectitude, does not benefit from the advantages of human existence). To convey just how few are interested in the ultimate goal, the Master says that, of ten who are ready to live, only three live by and with the Way.

Why? Because, having received life to follow the Way, they have gone astray; they have forgotten the purpose for which they were given life, and cling to life alone, with the relative benefits (possession, production, movement) inherent in this gift of life. Yet they lose these benefits at the same time as life, and have therefore lived without gain. They thus reach the moment of transition to another state, to death, without being sufficiently prepared for it; they fear it, seek to flee from it, fail to do so, and endure it without benefit. The Sage, on the contrary, who is not attached to life, because he is attached only to the benefits that lie beyond life, does not fear death (here come the comparisons of the tiger's claws and the soldier's sword). Death can do him no harm, for he continues to live truly, after human death, with the objects of his desires. That is why the Wise Man changes, but cannot die.

Towards the end of the treatise, there is a chapter devoted to the people, where it is stated, on the contrary, that they must be made to love life; this is a means of political guidance for the people in the hands of the Sages, who, through their detachment from life, have placed themselves above life.

XIV. – HERE THE WAY BRINGS FORTH; VIRTUE UNITES; BEINGS COME INTO BEING; THEY BECOME MODES. *Thus, the ten thousand beings revere the Way and respect Virtue, for the Way is venerable and Virtue is respectable. No one made them; they exist of their own accord. The Way produces, unites, increases, harmonises, forms, standardises, nourishes, protects. It produces beings and does not claim them as its own; it acts and takes no interest; it is great and gains nothing new. Such is its profound Righteousness.*

This is the great formula of Taoism. It is the direct explanation of Wenwang's tetragram: *uyan*, *heng*, *li*, *tsheng*, which we have commented on in The *Metaphysical Way*, and which is the key that unlocks the entire *I Ching*. Once again, we see how Taoism springs directly from the primordial tradition, pure of all admixture and all addition. The Way produces: this is the principle of activity established; it is Non-Being willfully becoming Being; it is the One, the positive determination of Zero. Virtue unites: this is the principle of passivity, equal perfection and a determination contrary to active perfection; it is Being becoming the creator; it is the Two, the feminine action of Unity. – Beings are formed: this is the origin of the flow of forms; it is the Creator acting upon his first will; it is the Three, the union of the One and the Two. They become modes: this is Being becoming beings within the

stream of forms, and receiving limits therein; this is the first manifestation of the creative will; this is the Four, the product of the union represented by the Three.

Now the One, which is the active masculine principle, proceeds from the Way. The Two, which is the passive feminine principle, proceeds from Righteousness; the Three and the Four represent the union and the human results of the union of the Way and Righteousness on the human plane. It is man, born of the union of Heaven and Earth, whom the *I Ching* proclaims, and whom, through its title, the oldest and most powerful of the universe's secret societies still proclaims to this day. One must, without ever thinking one could write down everything that can be said on the subject, meditate deeply on the Great Formula. It illuminates all metaphysical Taoism and all Yellow philosophy, in every age.

One may note the distinction that must be maintained in one's feelings towards the Way and Virtue: one venerates the former, which is divine; one respects the latter, which is the human application – and, as it were, the human embodiment – of the former. Only these two things arise of their own accord, and not from a union; but, as everything proceeds from the Way, everything must be traced back to the Way. Thus, the Way produces (the principle), unites (Righteousness), increases (the origin), harmonises (the flow of forms), shapes (the ten thousand beings), standardises (changes), and nourishes and protects (the processes of change).

The Way produces, but apart from this production, beings are independent. The Way acts, but apart from this act, the active are responsible. The Way is great, but apart from this greatness, men are free. And this is how the Way's own virtue manifests itself. For, from the moment it applies to man, the Way, too, has its Righteousness, and, by virtue of its original perfection, conforms to it.

XV. – *The original principle of mankind is the model for all mankind. He who knows the principle also knows the consequences: he who knows the children respects the mother. Thus, the generations never cease. To close one's door is to remain steadfast until death; to open to diligence, to adapt to circumstances, is to need no aid in death. He who understands the most subtle is clear. He who observes goodness is the strongest. He who aspires to the radiant Way turns to its light. Never to leave this light is the continual seeking of the Way.*

The original principle is the Way; but the original human principle is Righteousness; this is the model to which all men must conform. He who knows this principle wishes to know its consequences; and he strives to ensure they are fitting and meritorious, that is to say, natural; he who knows such consequences respects the principle that gave rise to them (here, the children are the consequences, and the mother is the principle). Such is the condition of immortality for mankind.

For one man in particular, closing his door is to prolong his life, whereas opening it is to drive himself to his death: it is a symbol by which we must understand that the will to non-action (and isolation amidst the multitudes) is the condition of immortality; whereas being swept along by the sentiments of the crowd, symbolised by the open door, dissipates the forces of life and leads to a pointless death. Now, he who lives obscurely and thoughtfully, behind his closed door, knows the most

subtle, and yet his conduct is clear and simple; he observes goodness, and yet he is the strongest of men. He owes this to the Way, to which he turns ceaselessly; he is clothed in the radiance of the Way, and, never taking his eyes off this light, he follows and seeks it continually, and one day partakes of its universal quality.

XVI. – *To train a man who knows the Way is to follow the Way, and the Way cherishes him as a son; the people revere him and listen to him. But to seek to gain without labour, to leave the land uncultivated and the body given to passion, to ignore one's nature, to seek constant gain, to drink, eat, and sing, to desire the increase of one's wealth, to commit evil and theft—this is not the Way.*

To follow the Way is to observe the flow of forms within the human condition. The composite that constitutes humanity is subject to the Way, just as all others who have come before, or who will come after. Thus the will of Heaven is satisfied first, because the human form manifests itself in the flow according to the Way; it is satisfied secondly if the beings limited by this form obey Righteousness, which is their temporary Way within this form, and at this moment in the flow in which they move.

The Master does not say here what this Righteousness is; but he indicates quite clearly what is the opposite of this Righteousness, so that we find here both the metaphysical doctrine of non-action and the social doctrine of non-governance.

XVII. – *He who knows how to act decisively needs no help; he who knows how to preserve cannot lose; his children and the children of his line will never cease to exist. For those who govern their minds well, virtue is righteousness; for those who govern their families well, virtue is abundance; for those who govern their villages well, virtue is endurance; for those who govern their provinces well, virtue is splendour; for those who govern all men well, virtue is universal. Thus, by considering myself, I know others; by considering my family, I know families; by considering my village, I know villages; by considering my province, I know provinces; by considering the people of my race, I know all people. How do we know this? Through experience itself.*

This page is the first to offer social advice openly, in an abstract and philosophical form; we shall thus find several such passages scattered throughout the treatise, and written with less restraint. For Laozi was never a timid teacher, and he always follows his thoughts through to their conclusion.

Here, he declares that the continual observance of Righteousness grants immortality. But this human righteousness is not of a single aspect like the heavenly Way: depending on the person to whom it applies, and depending on their duties or social status, it changes in quality whilst remaining Righteousness, that is to say, the particular path that every human must follow. Thus, individual Righteousness is and brings about integrity; family Righteousness is and brings about prosperity; group Righteousness is and brings about stability; racial Righteousness is and brings about splendour; social Righteousness is and brings about harmonious and universal unity. – What is the method of this generalisation? It is to draw conclusions from the particular, not to the general, but to all other particulars, and from one collective to all other

collectives. This method, which is supported by experience, is true only if individuals and communities follow parallel paths and have analogous motives, that is to say, if each conforms to the Righteousness that is proper to them.

XVIII. – *When one preserves virtue like newborn children, venomous creatures cannot sting, ferocious beasts cannot attack: one does not inherit evil things. The bones are slender, the nerves are soft, yet one possesses harmonious beauty. Thus one is both powerful and good; the mind is agile; subsequently, one is perfect, fearless, and peaceful. To know peace is constancy; to know constancy is clarity. When the mind commands the soul, that is strength. But strong things may perish. Thus this is not the* Tao*; today this is outside the* Tao.

This page sets out the human benefits conferred by a natural Righteousness. When the Sage possesses righteousness as a newborn child would, that is to say, simply, naturally and without effort, he is above all dangers and all pains; that is to say, he may be physically affected by them, but is no longer intellectually affected. Thus, gentleness and weakness result in frail bones and limp nerves, which, in a struggle, are no match for a sturdy frame and powerful muscles. But to one who does not wish to act, strength is useless, and whilst strong bones and large muscles are ugly, the one who does not struggle possesses harmonious beauty.

In this harmonious beauty, the intellect is agile; yet, having voluntarily renounced the physical means of struggle, the Sage is peaceful; peace brings him steadfastness, and steadfastness brings him clarity. Thus, everywhere and always, his mind rules his soul, and his reason rules his emotions. In this way he becomes immortal, since he is attached to nothing perishable. On the contrary, things which may be said to be strong may diminish in strength, weaken, and disappear. And those who, through some of their attachments, disappear, do not yet belong to the Way.

XIX. – *He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know. The Sage keeps his mouth shut; he closes his eyes; he lies down to think deeply; he opens his heart; he gathers his inner light, whilst mingling with the common people outside. Thus he is truly profound. He cares neither for friends nor enemies; he scorns both gains and losses, honours and disgrace. His example does good to all men.*

This is the law of intellectual isolation. The Sage must remain silent. The Sage closes his mouth, not only to preserve his knowledge from the defiling contact of ignorance, but so as not to lose his own breath and vital force. The Sage closes his eyes, not only so as not to scatter his light thoughtlessly, but so as not to lose his nervous and volitional power by fixing it on the objects of his vision. He lies down, not only to avoid the distractions of the outside crowd, but so as not to lose, through useless movements, the natural forces that his knowledge has concentrated within himself. Breath, personal power, external forces—he applies all to the activity of his thought. Thus, he gathers into a single beam, whose radiance is

turned inwards; thus, illuminated within, obscure without, he mingles with the whole of the outer populace, and blends in without surprising or shocking anyone. Therein lies the condition of his individual security. In these circumstances, he passes, without friends or enemies, equally unremarkable, amongst the indifferent crowd; he cares not for honours or glory; he is above disgrace, obscurity, and contempt. Nothing flatters him; nothing affects him. This is the true model of social Righteousness.

XX. – *Loyalty governs the empire; stratagem commands the armies. The absence of evil is beneficial to all men. How do we know this to be so? By this: do men defend evil? Villages are impoverished and take up arms. Is the empire troubled by its leaders? The people revolt and all things wither away. Does an intelligent leader unite the people? There are many thieves. Do men make laws? There are many crimes. That is why the Sage says: I do not act, and thus the people of the villages mend their ways. I seek rest, and the people of the villages set themselves right. I do not use force, and the people of the villages grow rich. I have no ambition, and the people of the villages live simply.*

Chapter XX of the second volume is to Righteousness as Chapter II of the first volume is to the Way. It is the doctrine of relativities creating one another and having no essential existence, which Laozi transfers from the metaphysical plane to the social plane. But what is a generalising system in the former – for the negation of relativity is an obvious asceticism in the metaphysical world – tends to become a nihilistic system in the latter, where relativities alone seem to be endowed with objective reality. This is why the Master has shrouded his thought in 'outer darkness', which is, incidentally, quite easy to dispel.

Loyalty (integrity, simplicity) governs the empire, that is to say, maintains peace; artifice (deception, violence) commands the armies, that is to say, drives them to war and disorder. This is an aphorism of which all humanity is convinced, even though those who lead it do not always conform their conduct and aspirations to it. But what is loyalty made of? And what of artifice? What is simplicity made of? And what of complication? The oral teachings of Taoism allow us to state that, here, the master means by simplicity the natural law, and by complication, laws that are not natural. And it is with this stark light, without the slightest softening, that he wishes to illuminate the following sentences: many prohibitions bring much misery; that is to say, when human prohibitions come to aggravate the prohibitions of natural law, prosperity is no longer possible. Many leaders bring much trouble, that is to say: when rulers impose themselves by force and, through their authority, exacerbate the prescriptions of natural law, there can be no order. When intelligent men come together, there are thieves; that is to say: when human cunning replaces the simplicity of natural law, nothing is possible save the rule of deceit. When men make laws, there are many crimes; that is to say: when conventional laws create, outside of nature, good and evil, civic or social, nothing is possible but crime

and perpetual transgression. This is the pure libertarian doctrine, as the Gnostic tradition once preserved it, as Rousseau dreamed it, as Proudhon restored it. It is of indisputable logic; and if it is opposed in the West with such passionate vehemence, it is not so much because of the principles it professes, as because of the consequences that some claim to draw from them.

This discussion is certainly beyond, and no doubt beneath, our concerns here. But let us note that this striking and decisive exposition is followed by the explicit advice given to the Sage, setting out how the doctrine is to be applied. The Sage does not act, and thus men, wholly subject to the sole action of Righteousness, amend their ways. The Sage rests without commanding, and thus men control themselves and correct themselves by the natural way. The Sage commits no violence, and thus men enrich and improve themselves. The Sage has no ambitions and makes no laws: thus men, freed from all constraints and difficulties, simplify their lives, perform few, simple actions, always the same, and in accordance with their interests and their natural conscience (for it is only through conventional and non-universal laws that interest may become or appear contrary to the conscience of Righteousness).

XXI. – *If the Sage teaches with caution, the common people become sincere; if the Sage teaches with insight, the common people reveal themselves. Good endures; good accomplished calls forth another; the memory of it remains to the very end. That which is not right is deceptive. Upright men who come to the Way are taught; those who know how to benefit are gentle; those who stray wander for a long time. Thus the perfect man can teach at once, but teaches only towards evening; he teaches perpetually, and not at a fixed time; he is upright, and does not seek to set others right. He is radiant, and does not seek to dazzle.*

This page, being one of those that has undergone numerous interpolations, is subject, even in China itself, to various interpretations. Moreover, as it contains no doctrinal precepts concerning either the Way or Righteousness, we shall adhere to our usual reserve by refraining from any commentary.

XXII. – *The governance of men and the workings of Heaven are not like the tranquillity of the grave. And yet, what tranquillity! Thus, for a long time, men have venerated it. To venerate for a long time is to accumulate virtue; to accumulate virtue is to live in harmony. To live in harmony is to push back the boundaries; to push back the boundaries is the way to govern. When the empire is loved like a mother, it endures and expands. For these are profound reasons and noble principles; this is how one lives long and constantly observes the* Tao.

The governance of men must take the action of Heaven as its model: the action of Heaven, which is tranquillity par excellence, is in no way the tranquillity of the grave: the grave is the material inertia of the dead thing, Heaven is the voluntary inaction of Being; Laozi seizes every opportunity to distinguish non-action from inertia, and tranquillity from immobility. The ideal governance of mankind would therefore be tranquillity, but attentive tranquillity; and, just as the action of Heaven is

internal and invisible, the sovereign's action must be inertia on the outside (the impossibility of overstepping boundaries) and action on the inside (concern for the people's happiness and solidarity among all men). It is for this acquiescence to Righteousness and for this resemblance to the Way that men revere the Sovereign. This is truly the way to govern, and there is no other. To identify with the Way, the empire identifies with the immensity and the very duration of the Way.

From an individual perspective, and outside the social sphere, to accumulate Virtue is to harmonise; to harmonise is to resemble, to identify. Individuals who identify with one another push back the boundaries of individuality, and thus begin their evolution.

XXIII. – *Governing a great empire is like cooking a small fish. The ruler must use the* Tao *to guide all people. There are many bad people and few good ones; is it not true that there are many bad people and few good ones? Bad people do not like other people: is that not also true? Everywhere, people do not like one another: the bad do not like the good, but Heaven reconciles them and brings them peace through virtue.*

This entire page is imbued with a singular symbolism. The fish must be cooked over a low heat, just as the empire must be governed with prudence; the fish is imperceptible and motionless amidst the boiling water that tosses it to and fro; likewise, the sovereign stands alone amidst a vast populace, whose movements affect him and whose opinion influences him. Moreover, is it better to cook the fish in water that boils suddenly, or gradually in lukewarm water? Is it better to govern the empire with the strong and the bold, or with the gentle and the weak? Cold water and boiling water are mutually exclusive; and in the same way, the strong despise the weak, and the wicked hate the good. It is a certain fact that men do not love one another: the gentle do not love the strong, whom they call violent and evil; the strong do not love the gentle, whom they call inert and weak. And yet, they call themselves good, evil, weak and violent only because they are men; in reality, they are none of these things. That is why, when Heaven brings them together through this virtue (which is the Way) and causes them to lose their human nature, they become peaceful and reconcile with one another.

XXIV. – *A great country is like deep water; it sympathises with all men. This very quality brings peace, prosperity and strength; peace brings gentleness. That is why a great country is gentle towards small countries, and safeguards their security; small countries respect great countries, they remain loyal to them; that is why the small cling to the great, and the great hold the small. A great country brings together many people; a small country barely brings together eight. Both have the means to do as they please. Thus greatness is identified with gentleness.*

Deep water surrounds the earth, seeps into the smallest crevices, and makes it fertile and beautiful; so a great nation must surround its people with kindness

beneficial. From it, men derive peace; from peace, prosperity; from prosperity, strength. Yet, though strong, this method implies that force is not used; and thus this kind of strength brings about gentleness. Thus is translated, into social language, that metaphysical dogma that the active principle necessarily causes the presence of the passive principle, and that, when brought into contact with one another, they unite. In accordance with this union, the great country unites with the small countries by ensuring their security, and the small countries unite with the great by assuring it of their loyalty. The protection of the strong and the loyalty of the weak are of equal virtue, and balance one another. There is a mutual benefit; both are happy, for both do precisely what they can, and what corresponds to their stature [5] . They are therefore each in their Righteousness, and this Righteousness manifests itself precisely through gentleness, which is a kind of social non-action.

XXV. – *The Way is the condition of all men: through it one loves the good and shuns the wicked. Kind words and gentleness can attract men. As for the wicked, of whom there are sometimes some, a king and three ministers have been appointed for them. United together, they move faster and stronger than four harnessed horses; but they cannot, like the one who is at peace, ascend to the Way. For a long time, the Sage revered the Way; he found it without seeking it and, through it, healed the unfortunate. Thus, all men then loved the Way.*

For good men, the Way, which is the condition of all, suffices by its gentleness. For the wicked, who obey only force, it was necessary to establish a king and three ministers (the positive quaternary of created relativities). But, however united, however strong, however perfect they may be, these four agents of power cannot do what the Way does, the sole agent of gentleness. The Sage, who knew the Way, and who found it without seeking it, once brought the wicked back to the Way through the Way. And so all men loved the Way alone. But this is no longer possible since there is ‘a king and three ministers’. This means that social institutions, even when their authority is exercised solely in the spirit of Righteousness, are incompatible with the true Way, and that the Way only reappears universally to mankind after the disappearance of social institutions and governments.

XXVI. – *To act as though one were not acting; to work as though one were not working; to feel as though one were not feeling; to regard small things as great, and rare things as numerous; to take the wicked for the virtuous; to regard difficult things as easy; to regard great things as small: this is how men went astray. They thought that everything was easy; they thought that the greatest things were small. That is why the Sage does not act, and is great; that is why he often becomes even greater; he speaks softly, but what he says*

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[5] The small country has as few people as possible: it has only eight; eight is the number of the primitive trigrams; there could never have been fewer than eight characters in graphic transcriptions. Eight is therefore the symbol of the numerical minimum.

is the truth. Certainly, difficult things are easy for him. The Sage believes that there are still difficulties; thus, later on, there are no more difficulties.

This page contains a curious peculiarity of the Yellow Ideogram System, one that is worth pausing to consider. We know that punctuation, as signs, consists solely of a small circle placed, in the manner of an algebraic 'subscript', to the right of the character that conveys a complete meaning; we know, moreover, that the characters, written from right to left and from top to bottom, form series of vertical columns; when a sentence, or rather, when a line of reasoning begins with a major idea, the character representing that major idea is placed at the head of one of the columns, and this column, on the page, begins higher up than the other columns on the same page, in order to tangibly indicate the supremacy of the idea that the author wishes to distinguish from the rest of the reasoning. By altering the punctuation, and by successively raising and lowering – at the moment of phonetic translation – the column of characters expressing that 'men were in error', one obtains the individual or human meaning, then the general or metaphysical meaning of this page, depending on whether, through this dual arrangement, the determinative phrase 'men were in error', which is found in the middle of page XXVI, applies to the first or the last part of the page. The meaning conveyed by the translation as punctuated above is the individual human meaning. The Master indicates that men who allow themselves to be led astray by individualism, and who come to regard as real only the products or advantages of the individual, lose the benefit of their action, their work, and their feelings; for, by applying them to this immediate end, individuals who are nothing but a relative entity, and who have no counterpart in the metaphysical universe—the only reality and the sole companion of our evolution—annihilate all their effort, and are truly as though they did not act, did not work, did not feel. A close-up view of these objects obscures from them the broader view of general matters, and consequently upsets the balance and accuracy of their concepts; for they attribute all the qualities of cause and necessity solely to the objects they see, and upon which they base their decisions. Consequently, they mistake the wicked for the virtuous, the difficult for the easy, the great for the small, and fall into continual error. As for the Wise Man, his inaction towards the products of individualism conceals the greatness of his action towards the collective universe: the less he therefore seems to act in the deluded eyes of individuals, the greater he becomes; and, contrary to them, he regards things as difficult, even the easiest; he behaves towards them as if they were truly difficult; and thus he overcomes all obstacles, and there are no longer any difficulties for him.

Thanks to the reversal of punctuation and the change in the height of the central column of characters, the general metaphysical meaning is precisely that the Sage, in the mistaken perception of individualised humans, acts in the very way that humans do not act; that he works in the very way that humans do not work, and so on. ; therefore, men believe he does the opposite of what, in reality, he does. But his action eludes them, as do the motives behind his action, which are general and of a superhuman order. Consequently, the Sage views all human matters from the same perspective, the great as well as the small, the difficult as well as the easy;

and he treats the wicked just as he treats the virtuous. Thus, he behaves as the *Tao* dictates, in which we have seen that relativities give rise to one another, that a relative thing cannot exist without its opposite, and that, consequently, neither one nor the other truly exists. What is true in the material realm is also true in the moral realm: thus, the Sage, in his metaphysical conception, regards the wicked and the virtuous as two parallel human beings, whose wickedness and virtue are distinguished from one another, and are destined to disappear together, at the same time as the contingent motives that created them, and the temporary consciences that determined them and are affected by them. By pushing the implications of this passage a little further in a metaphysical sense, one will come to understand the doctrine of the relativity of good and evil, and the illusory nature of human dualism and the morality attached to it.

XXVII. – *That which is tranquil is easy to maintain; that which is at rest is easy to preserve; that which is weak is easy to break; that which is small is easy to disperse. One must forestall the event before it occurs; one must pacify before the harvest bursts forth. A tree, which a man could barely embrace, has a fine hair for a root; a nine-storey tower began with a handful of earth; a thousand* lilies *begin with a single step. He who labours may fail; he who gains something may lose it. That is why the Sage does not labour to gain things, and therefore cannot lose them. If the people gain, they usually end up with loss. One must be mindful of the beginning and the end of things: thus, one will not lose them. That is why the Sage clings to indifference, and desires neither to gain nor to acquire anything. He knows without studying; he walks alongside other men, yet he makes his own way alone. He is superior to the ten thousand beings, yet he detaches himself from them, and dares not influence them.*

This is, in philosophical and social terms, and distilled into aphorisms, the metaphysical principle set out in the opening pages of *the I Ching*: 'By treading on the frost, ice comes into being'. Both in the individual and in the community—that is, in all compounds and assemblages that have a beginning or a relative origin—it is the beginning that is, for the Sage, the important thing. What is below is like what is above, but in the opposite sense; thus, the Sage must pay attention to the beginning, that is to say, to the principle of the Way, so that he may conform to it, and he must also pay attention to the contingent beginning of things, so that they may conform to him. And this metaphysical precept is also, first and foremost, social and moral. For, at their birth, the ten thousand beings, things and people, are weak and small, and, consequently, easy to guide in the direction the Sage has resolved. It is easy to break the root of a sprouting tree, or to destroy a tower barely begun; it is impossible to break a tree that a man could barely embrace, or to destroy a nine-storey tower. Thus, the Sage must seize upon passions at their inception to stifle them, and take hold of the people at their first gathering, in order to rule over them. Such is the meaning of the Master's words.

But he immediately emphasises the means of this domination, whether individual or collective: they must not be means of action, but means of example. It is by avoiding the acquisition of desires that the Sage avoids having passions; it is by turning away from men that men turn towards him

to follow him, without their having called upon him. In this way, the Sage remains superior; and even if men and things were to detach themselves from him to their own ruin, he would not be diminished by it, since he has not united himself with them, nor given them anything of himself.

XXVIII. – *In times past, those who knew the Way did not seek to enlighten the people. If they encountered wrongdoing, they immediately put a stop to it. It is difficult to govern men, for it requires knowledge. If those who rule the empire act by force, the empire rebels. If one governs the empire with gentleness, the empire is happy. He who knows these two things can put them into practice; at times, he knows how to put them into practice together. This is the profound virtue; the profound virtue is secret, and penetrates the intentions of men. All things turn to it; it brings about harmonious bliss.*

This chapter is rather unusual, for it can and must be understood in two ways; the first meaning is quite clear: it states that it is very difficult to rule over people without the Way. Yet to brutally suppress wrongdoing is not the Way; and the people, who are unconsciously and traditionally inclined towards the Way, rebel if led with brutality, but obey if led with gentleness (cf. the chapters of *the Tao* where it is shown that the governments which best conform to the Way are precisely those which act the least, and which do the bare minimum of their duty as rulers). But it must be noted (and it is to this observation that the aphorism at the end of this page applies, namely that profound virtue is secret) that, whilst it is true that brutal repression is not in accordance with the Way, the evil deeds that give rise to this repression are already outside the Way. Consequently, it would not be the rulers, but the ruled who would have begun to stray from the Way. This seems contrary to the whole teaching of Laozi, and, in reality, Laozi did not say this. He said that the first leaders of the people conformed to the Way, but had not spread knowledge of the Way amongst their people; thus, the people obeyed the Way without knowing it. But as soon as they believed they knew it, following certain revelations by imprudent leaders, they sought to follow it through reasoning; since they knew it poorly and could only know it poorly, they reasoned poorly, and followed the Way poorly. This teaching is perfectly in line with the esoteric tradition, which holds that knowledge must be acquired personally, and not through collective popularisation, which is always dangerous. From a social perspective, it will astonish Western circles, where there is an absolute belief in the benefits of compulsory education.

XXIX. – *Rivers and seas, as they flow, form a hundred deep abysses; so too are kings. Waters know only how to flow downwards; so too do the hundred lineages of kings. The perfect man, who wishes the people to progress, speaks softly to them. He speaks before the people, and each one walks behind him (follows his teachings). Thus, when the Sage holds a higher position, the people are happy; when he holds a lower position, the people do not suffer. Thus, all men are content and earnest. Since the Sage does not contend, no one finds cause to contend.*

Who, then, is the nourisher of the soil? It is water. Who carries the soil along with it, and turns it into fertile silt? It is water. Water is therefore both the master and the benefactor of the world. But why does water fulfil this role? Because it always occupies the lowest level of the valleys, and can do nothing but flow downwards. If it did not always flow downwards to occupy the lowest points, the land would not follow it. So it is with kings and all leaders, who are called upon to lead, govern and bring prosperity to nations. The Sage, who is the finest of leaders, stoops down to speak to the people, and the people follow him only insofar as they do not suffer from his superiority. Now the people will not resent this superiority if the Sage, content merely to present it to them, does not impose it upon them. Not resenting it, they will have no cause for conflict. In short, the Master teaches that the people follow a man with ardour and to good effect only if they have recognised him as worthy of their choice, and if they have chosen him.

XXX. – *Men believe themselves to be great and equal to those who do not diminish; if they were truly great, they would not diminish; and yet, they diminish little by little and ceaselessly. Now we possess three precious things, which we guard jealously: the first is the growth of virtue; the second is prudence; the third is that one does not dare to place oneself at the head of men. The growth of virtue gives strength; prudence gives generosity; not putting oneself before others allows one to become their leader. To think of acting without yet acting—that is strength; to maintain prudence—that is greatness; to remain humble—that is the highest rank. At death, this growth continues, and there is benefit. If one holds fast to virtue, Heaven protects, and bestows a slight advantage of its own accord.*

He who truly possesses the mark of greatness can never diminish, for true greatness lies not in quality but in essence. Thus, men, whatever their beliefs on the matter may be, possessing nothing of their own beyond the contingencies of life, diminish involuntarily, little by little, yet constantly. The three precious gifts retained by the Sage spare him this diminishment; they are growth in virtue, circumspection, and social modesty; these three things are the aids by which men may, without diminishing themselves, traverse the circle of human existence.

When these three qualities are acquired by the Wise Man for the sole purpose of contributing to his evolution, they are no less advantageous to him within the very cycle of human life itself. Thus, he acquires strength, generosity, and, as stated on the previous page, the humble indifference that merits the highest rank among the people. And, having been useful during life, these three precious gifts, aiding the transition from the present individuality to the higher individuality, bring a truly heavenly advantage; and this advantage consists in bringing the individual into a more eminent life, consciously, and with all the benefit of the merits acquired.

XXXI. – *The subtle one who knows science is not belligerent; the subtle one who knows how to lead is not violent; the subtle one who knows how to act skilfully does not struggle. The subtle one*

He who employs men is gentle with them. Thus, one does not strive for virtue; thus, this employment of men gives strength. This is an action akin to that of Heaven: such was the ancient state of total perfection.

This is, on the three planes, the application by the subtle man of the preceding teachings; on the metaphysical plane, he is patient; on the ethical plane, peaceful; on the social plane, skilful. Thus, not striving for virtue ensures the strength and triumph of the subtle. The Master indicates that this is, on the human plane, the image of the union of *K'ien* and *K'un* (see the first two chapters of *the I Ching*), or of certain perfection and first perfection, the first fertilising the second, the second enveloping and stimulating the first; 'gentleness overcomes all'. And this was the primordial perfection.

XXXII. – *One must speak thus to the violent. I do not wish to be the leader, but the outsider; I dare neither rise an inch nor step down a foot. Thus, to command without appearing to command; not to quarrel; to win without violence. One must begin a thing quietly and gently; to begin gently is the mechanism that is our treasure. He who acts thus is stronger than armies. Much thought brings success.*

Herein lies the political and social application of the preceding precepts. It is very easy to lead men who are gentle and naturally in harmony with the Way; but the more violent men are, the more difficult it becomes to lead them; one must therefore present oneself to them, not as the future and necessary leader, but as a stranger, a passing guest, who, both by temperament and courtesy, does not perform even the simplest actions, such as stepping back or stepping forward. Thus one comes to command without appearing to command; the leader's action is blended into his words, and even more so into his conduct, and the materiality of the command is not perceived. In reality, as in the passage concerning the tree, the tower and the symbolic thousand *lilies*, one must begin gently to succeed; one must begin very gently, so that the leader's actions, his person and his ultimate goal remain hidden from the indifferent multitude. This is the very mechanism that once made Fohi and the traditional Sages all-powerful. And it is through this that a single thinker is superior to a multitude of armies.

XXXIII. – *Our words are very easy to understand, very easy to put into practice. People do not understand them very well, nor do they put them into practice very often. Indeed, they say: 'Words belong to the great; deeds belong to kings; we know nothing of these things; truly, we know nothing of them.' Few of us are self-aware; for that alone, we are already esteemed. The Sage knows all; his heart is clear as a diamond.*

A simple observation of the unfortunate decline of societies, as men have strayed from the Way and place their trust only in the powerful, whose strength seems necessary to maintain order and security, whereas these should be natural and unconsciously provided by the ordinary course of events. The people, now ignorant of the Sages, see kings and the great as leaders who must

be anything other than the police and the arm of the Wise, and leaves the care of orders and actions to them. The Wise, now alone in their self-awareness, stand aloof, and this testimony suffices for their conscience and their peace of mind.

XXIV. – *To know and not to foresee; not to foresee (at the moment one knows), this is the great harm. One seeks to relieve oneself of it. The Sage suffers no harm; as harm affects men, he relieves them of it.*

This page is, as we have already noted for another page of *the Te*, open to different interpretations, depending on the arrangement of the characters and the placement of the pauses. The Sage must know – which is a matter of general knowledge – and must not foresee – which is a matter of specific political application. Failing to foresee and knowing too late (which is to say, not knowing) – that is the great harm; for whilst knowledge protects without foresight and by its own natural force, lack of foresight coupled with insufficient or belated knowledge leads to the deepest abysses. It is from this disaster that the Sage seeks to protect mankind.

Following the ideographic transposition, the social plane becomes the metaphysical plane, and this passage reads much more simply: knowing that one knows nothing is sufficient knowledge for a man, if not for a Sage. To suffer from this awareness of one's ignorance is the first step towards perfection.

XXXV. – *If the people do not fear loss, then their complete ruin ensues, and there is no longer any means of preserving their material possessions. If they suffer this ill fate, they may say that they have, par excellence, the ill fate. The Sage knows himself, yet is unaware of his fate; he delights in not being great. Thus, he abandons this and embraces that.*

Such is the difference between the Sage, who follows the Way because he knows it, and the people, who conform to it without knowing it, and according to the teachings of the Sage; the Sage possesses nothing, and fears nothing; the people possess; they are compelled to possess, and it is fitting that they continue to possess; they must therefore fear losing what they possess. If they do not have this fear, they face the worst fate, for, being unable to grasp abstract motives and no longer possessing concrete motives, they stray from the Way.

The Wise Man knows himself; this knowledge is enough for him, for it promises him infinitely more than the present can offer; he therefore remains indifferent to his fate and prefers tranquillity to greatness.

XXXVI. – *He who has courage and dares may kill; he who has courage but does not dare is incapable. Of these two things, one may be advantageous, the other harmful. Heaven does not like this; let everyone know this perfectly well. That is why the Sage finds all this difficult. Such is the Way of Heaven: that the Sage does not struggle, but triumphs; that he does not speak, but is heard; that he seeks nothing, yet all comes to him; that he seems inert, yet has a skilful method. Heaven's net is very wide; yet no one can slip through it.*

To know, to dare, and to take life, on the one hand; to know, not to dare, and not to take life, on the other part, voilà les deux méthodes habituelles de gouvernement ; elles

correspond, one to violent leaders, who would like to lead men to the Way by force, but cannot, and lead them elsewhere; the other to timid leaders, who know not how to lead men anywhere. Heaven favours neither of these methods, even though their successive use might yield some advantage. In these actions, which have insufficient motives, mediocre agents, and imperfect means, the Sage sees nothing simple. For his method of governance is precisely to perform no act of governance. And the Master indicates that this apparent inaction conceals the best method. By following it, no one can slip through the meshes of the heavenly net; that is to say, everyone harmonises and conforms to the Way, as far as lies within them.

XXXVII. – *If the people no longer fear death, how can they be ruled by that fear? But those who command men who fear death, whilst being full of caution, can put them to death. Sometimes one kills in secret; but one is killed in turn; the murderer's death compensates for the murder. Such is the recompense for a grave offence; yes, I say it is the recompense for a grave offence. But there are few men who do not fear doing wrong.*

The fear of death among the people is the best means of government; for then one may threaten them with death if they do not follow the instructions given. This advice given to sovereigns is intended solely to encourage them – through a reason they can all grasp, that is to say, a reason of self-interest – to instil a fear of death in their subjects, that is to say, to make their lives happy. As for rulers whose subjects fear death, their threats must be measured and full of caution. And we see that the Master, without expressly forbidding the carrying out of threats, provides for retribution against those who would carry them out.

The threat of death is merely a safeguard; putting someone to death is murder, and is avenged by the murderer's death. This is the first application of the doctrine of the 'backlash' of human actions, which is the subject of the *Kan-ing* treatise. Every act carries within it a seed of the future, and the manifestation of the act necessarily triggers a sanction which may occur immediately or later, but the sum of which accompanies the perpetrator of the act throughout their life. It is when this sum is equal to zero that *Nirvana* is finally attained. We shall have occasion to compare the Taoist doctrine with the Hindu doctrine of *karma* and the Christian doctrine of original sin.

XXXVIII. – *The people are starving whilst the great devour; yes, they are starving. The people are difficult to govern when the great act; yes, they are difficult to govern. The people scorn death when they are forced to revolt for their very existence; yes, they scorn death. They have no interest in living; let the faithful men take an interest in living.*

Here, the Master applies to society the principle of ethnicity established elsewhere. Only the misconduct of those in authority can make the people unhappy; and the people's unhappiness leads them to lose their zest for life, to scorn death, and consequently to spend a mediocre existence in rebellion. Those in authority therefore immediately bear the

consequences of their error, because this error, as a just repercussion, causes them to lose the only means of governance they can possess over men who have strayed from the Way.

It is this passage, along with several others indeed, that justifies the Confucian communist doctrine – and even the anti-dynastic doctrine of modern Taoists. The only rulers who publicly embraced Taoism were precisely those philosopher-rulers, haughty and solitary, who regarded the Sages not as executors of wills—which they took care not to possess—but as representatives of the imperial personality, which they even disdained to manifest outwardly. And the peculiarity of the matter is that the reigns of these singular masters brought to the people that peaceful and obscure loyalty, which is in reality the height of happiness on earth.

XXXIX. – *The living man is soft and supple; dead, he is hard and rigid. Living plants are soft and tender; dead, they are hard and dry. Strong and rigid, men go to death; soft and supple, they go to life. Thus, the violent and the strong have no advantage. A tree is strong, but the soil beneath it is even stronger. So what is above becomes soft and supple.*

Let us see here nothing but symbolic aphorisms: the rigidity of a corpse and the suppleness of a living body are images to show how inflexible hardness is the preserve of death and inertia, and that agile softness is the preserve of life and evolution. Therefore, hard and inflexible characters produce only works of death. On a social level, a tree is only as strong as the soil from which it springs and into which it sinks its roots is itself stronger and more nourishing; which means that those in high places draw all their power from the consent of the people beneath them; if, therefore, they constantly keep this truth in mind, they will become supple and flexible, not merely out of common sense, not merely to obey the Way, but out of self-interest.

XL. – *The man who follows the Way is like a bow; he supports those above him; he protects those below. He has an abundance of goods, and gives them to those who have not enough. Thus, the wealthy man who follows the Way keeps little for himself, and gives to those in need. The Way of men is not the same; he who follows it gives to those who have too much, and takes from those who have not enough. He who, being very rich, gives his surplus to the people, follows the* Tao. *Thus, the Sage produces and does not take credit; he does great things and does not boast of them. He refuses to put his name to the deeds of his wisdom.*

The man who follows the Way is like a bow. In relation to his superiors, he is the string, which, attached to both ends of the bow, follows its movement and direction; in relation to his inferiors, he is like the bow that guides and protects the movements of the string. Moreover, this is also true in the diagram, for the bow and the string that supports it are, on the tangential circle of the human race, the vertical projections of individual life and cyclical evolution. Now, when a bow is drawn, the bending of the bow gives the string—which is ordinarily rigid—play and elasticity, and it is through this

elasticity alone that the bow can fulfil its purpose. Likewise, it is only when flexible men infuse the rigidity of hard-hearted men with their flexibility, it is only when the wealthy give their surplus to the destitute, that the universe will behave in accordance with the Way.

The pseudo-Way that men usually follow is precisely the opposite: for them, 'water always flows to the river'. But the Sage creates and takes no credit for his creations, and does not even wish that, by signing his works, he might be recognised by the marks of his wisdom.

We see how this passage carries over, into the social sphere and indeed into the realm of practical economics, the metaphysical principle of reflective stillness and voluntary inaction. Non-possession is the social form of non-action. But one must note here one of the rare points of agreement, at least on the surface, between Taoism and Buddhism, when it is asserted that the Universe will conform to the Way only to the extent that all individuals share in an equal flexibility, that is to say, an equality of life. Here, on the level of logic, lies the sentimental axiom: 'The Universe will not be saved if there is a single man who is not saved'.

XLI. – *Men must be weak and gentle as water; those who are hard and strong can gain nothing. This is not easy to understand: the weak triumph over the strong, and the supple over the rigid. Men do not know this and cannot conform to it. Therefore, the Sage says: he who seems the least in the empire is master of himself and becomes the leader; he who seems the least in the empire does not show himself and becomes the master of men. These true words have a hidden meaning.*

What is weaker in appearance than water? What is stronger in reality, because, being supple, it is insinuating, enveloping, and without personal resistance? It overcomes the hardest rocks and the earth itself. Men must take it as their model and acquire its qualities of slow, caressing and irresistible strength. But if the weak triumph over the strong, let the great remember that the common people, from whom they came and from whom they draw all their power, may at any moment triumph over them.

The lowliest in the empire becomes its master, because, being selfless, he has learnt to master himself and can become the master of others; because, being perfect, he rises invincibly to the rank due to his merit and his selfless effort; and finally because, being obscure, he causes no offence to anyone, despite his perfection, and encounters no adversaries in his ascent, which is both imperceptible and unexpected.

XLII. – *Appearing to appease a great resentment whilst keeping it greater, yet secret, men imagine that this is tranquillity and harmony. Thus, the Sage keeps all written on his left side and reproaches men for nothing. He who possesses virtue gradually concentrates his power; he who possesses no virtue gradually scatters it through his agitation. The man who follows the Way fears nothing; in it, he is united with all upright men.*

The first step towards self-control is to keep one's feelings to oneself and act as if one had none; on an emotional level, this means forgiving and not

forget. Men, accustomed to seeing others act immediately or after a more or less prolonged restraint, in accordance with the passions of others, find that this mediocre degree is sufficient to ensure tranquillity and harmony. This is entirely false; to act in accordance with the Way, the act must not be altered in any way by the acts of others; one must therefore either be unaware of them, or forget them completely. It is, says the Master, that men suffer, by the Will of Heaven, the 'backlash' of their actions; but they must, under no circumstances, be the judges of whether it is appropriate to impose this upon others or not.

This supreme restraint carries its own reward; for the man who follows the impulses of his anger, or of any other passion, scatters his efforts and renders himself powerless in life; he who, through thoughtful stillness, concentrates his active power, becomes the master of events, having never lost any of his strength or will. Thus, the Sage who conforms to this precept of the Way has nothing to fear in this world.

XLIII. – *If I ruled a small kingdom and righteous men, I would take nothing of their many possessions. I would command them to fear death and not to leave their country; they would have boats and would not board them; they would have breastplates and would not don them. Binding with ropes would be the only punishment for the guilty. Sweet foods, I would eat; fine clothes, I would wear; a peaceful land, I would dwell in; all beautiful things, I would keep. Let men keep this precept, and let even the dogs and the cocks listen too: until old age and death, let them not gather together in a kingdom.*

This page, which is the last written by Laozi – for the final chapter, consisting of a series of aphorisms and general maxims, contains only a summary intended to aid human memory, and no new teaching – this page is the social testament of the founder of Taoism. It is upon the precepts it contains – expressed with a clarity and vigour unparalleled and very rare in the Far East – that the entire political and social system was built, a system which the national dynasties fostered in China and which brought these peoples many centuries of peace and happiness. It is these precepts that form the entirety of the teaching, both occult and public, through which the adherents of Taoism established a tradition that was libertarian in regard to individuals and communist in regard to the 'tribe'—a tradition that made them suspect in the eyes of the rulers of the Tartar and Manchu dynasties, and turned them into martyrs revered by the people. Confucius and the other practical philosophers, economists and politicians who came later sometimes succeeded in mitigating the consequences of such a rigid and absolute system; but they did not succeed in eradicating it from the love and observance of the race; and it is doubtful whether, in some distant future, the accession of the yellow race to universal global progress will be able to dispel its hitherto all-powerful influence. It might perhaps be more likely that the other races, driven irresistibly towards better concepts by a silent yet profound appetite for goodness, altruism and peace, will find, in these ancient precepts—renewed and adapted by the experience of a

two-thousand-year-old humanity, the solutions to certain ethnic and social problems fraught with dispute and obscurity.

To paraphrase this page is, so to speak, superfluous; were it to be complete, it would be too long; it is entirely contained within the twenty-five centuries of the Celestial Empire's history. Let us summarise it very briefly: the sovereign must be indifferent to the material wealth of his kingdom and to the possessions of his subjects; the subjects must live where fate has placed them and love life, which the sovereigns must make as easy for them as possible. Defensive weapons must exist, but the sovereign must act in such a way that they remain forever useless. The death penalty must be abolished. And, so that the sovereign may have as little power as possible—that is to say, as few active opportunities as possible—and so that government may be a concept rather than a reality, *let everyone live and die without gathering in crowds*. If every family lives separately, there is no need for any sovereign other than the father. And thus the association of interests leads to rule by ambition, and it is the people's own agitation that creates the power of their masters. If they later suffer at their hands, do they have the right to complain of an evil whose cause they themselves have brought about?

LXIV. – *The words people believe are not the right ones; the right words are not believed. What is good is not remembered; what is remembered is not good. Knowledge is not passed on; what is passed on is not knowledge. The Sage keeps nothing to himself, but writes to teach mankind. He writes to teach all mankind; behold, he has already taught them much. The Way of Heaven saves all mankind and leads none astray. The Sage who follows the Way acts and does not fret.*

It was after thus clearly concluding the most mysterious, the most traditional, and at the same time the most revolutionary book ever written, that Laozi crossed, without turning his head, the wall that enclosed the empire, and vanished forever, silently and into a definitive shadow, from the midst of this land, which he marked with his indelible imprint, and which in return bestowed upon him imperishable glory, pious veneration and immortal loyalty.

CHAPTER V

Corresponding Actions and Reactions

The *Tai-Chang-Kan-ing-pien*, or the *Kan-ing* Book[1] of Tai-chang, is the last and most comprehensible of the traditional texts of early Taoism. Despite Mr Stanislas Julien and other great scholars of Sinology, who studied China from the Pont des Arts (that is to say, as members of the Institute, and by no means as blind men, as some irreverent souls might insinuate), I am obliged to state straight away that this text is not by Laozi, at least in the immediate sense that it was not Laozi who composed the characters.

This can be proven by a philological observation, which must carry great weight with Western minds, since philology is a Western science. One says and writes: the Book of Tai-chang, just as one says and writes: the *Tao* of Laozi, or the *Te* of Laozi. Now, Tai-chang is a nickname of Laozi, who had many, like all the illustrious sons of Heaven. Tai-chang is in reality a qualifying suffix meaning precisely '*the Most High*', and by which it is customary to designate Laozi, just as one designates the Christian God by calling *him the Most High*.

But the Chinese, being traditional and formalistic, having made, for the teaching of courtesy and etiquette, a Code of Rites more revered and inviolable than any legislative, civil or criminal code, do not bestow their nicknames indiscriminately. In particular, they never call a living person 'Thai-chang'. Consequently, the epithet 'Thai-chang', when applied to someone, invariably indicates that they are dead. Therefore, the fact that the *Kan-ing* is by Thai-chang (or, to be precise, *by* Thai-chang Laozi) means that Laozi was dead when his *Kan-ing* was written down in characters.

Laozi is nonetheless the direct author of part of *the Kan-ing*, and the inspiration behind the entire spirit of this text. It is worth recalling here the frequency, the omnipotence and the unblemished purity of the oral tradition among the yellow peoples and especially among races with ideographic writing. A tradition is preserved

[1] To date, the *Book of Sanctions* has been translated four times: by Mr Rémusat in 1816; by Messrs Klaproth and Heumann in 1828; by Mr Stanislas Julien in 1835; and by Mr Pauthier around 1856. Of these various translations, only the last is acceptable and faithful; unfortunately, like almost all of Pauthier's works, it is impossible to find. I believe it would be beneficial for those engaged in Sinology to produce a new edition of this text, taking great care to avoid expurgating, rewriting or revising it, in accordance with the practice so dear to bibliophiles and executors.

not rigidly, if it is retained only in the depths of the mind; it must also, and absolutely, be preserved and passed on in the form in which the master clothed it. In alphabetic languages, if the ear does not retain the assonance of the letters, individual memory and successive transmission distort the texts and transform them through the unconscious but inevitable use of synonyms and approximations. In languages with ideographic writing, one retains not the word but the idea, and the idea has but a single mode of transcription. Oral tradition, even across several generations, thus remains perfect; and it is frequently employed in this way.

It is therefore absolutely certain that the portion of *the Kan-ing* dating back to Laozi was written exactly as he had conceived and taught it, without omission or alteration of any kind, and it is equally certain that this transcription was made only after Laozi's death; we are, moreover, unaware of the reasons for this delay; they must have been powerful and logical, but it is preferable not to speculate on matters of reasoning and facts that have forever escaped human attention.

But the *Kan-ing*, by the very admission of its writers and early commentators, is not entirely by Laozi. Indeed, almost entirely, it belongs to relatively modern Taoist scholars, who had inherited his spirit or who believed in him, and in whom the masses believed. And one may believe that the teaching contained in *the Kan-ing* was so brief that the Master deemed it unnecessary to transcribe it, and suitable for auditory memorisation. Nowhere in the propositions of *the Kan-ing* is the precise, rhythmic, reciprocal and aphoristic idea of *the Tao* or the *Te* to be found. Above all, the Master's impersonal, metaphysical and ascetic demeanour is absent. And the moral precepts which illustrate, more or less adequately, the Taoist dogma, betray their modernism and the influence of the masses, of civilisation, and of Buddhist society.

These moral precepts are supported by a certain number – too many, since they number as many as four hundred – of legendary tales, in which we see kings and scholars punished for failing to follow the rules of *the Kan-ing*, and peasants and beggars rewarded for obeying them; this crude literature is entirely unworthy of traditional Taoism; it betrays a need to astonish the public, and also to entertain them, which is the hallmark of the most mediocre proselytism. Mr Rémusat translated only sixteen of these stories, and he was quite right to do so; Mr Julien took it upon himself to translate, and imposed upon his readers the task of reading, the full four hundred stories, which is a truly excessive undertaking; but one may excuse Mr Julien, bearing in mind that he translated for the joy of translating, without much concern for ideas or systems.

Be that as it may, it is of the utmost importance to sort out here, once and for all, what in the *Kan-ing* is by Laozi, and what is by his disciples, whether more or less distant or more or less inspired.

The gentle and commendable moral principles with which modern Taoism, whilst distorting itself, has become imbued, make without doubt a duty to transcribe faithfully the
'commandments' of good and evil, by which the

faithful and those who have forgotten the Way. But we shall not follow them with any commentary: their statement alone suffices for their philosophical and traditional significance.

On the contrary, we shall elucidate the master's very brief text with rather lengthy explanations, for there was a profound reason why the *Kan-ing* was so short, whether in the oral tradition or in the ideographic transcription; it is that the Taoist teaching on this subject is secret, and of the highest secrecy that exists, that is to say, of that secret which the man who possesses it cannot reveal to the man who does not possess it, since the latter would not understand it if it came from another, but which he discovers on his own, and as an axiom, on the very day when he is, not only capable by his knowledge of understanding it, but worthy by his virtue to enjoy the benefits of its discovery. We shall therefore take the explanation as far as is possible without falling, not into indiscretion, but into incomprehensible darkness, content to have warned the public that this darkness becomes light for eyes accustomed to looking and seeing without the aid of the external sun, and keeping, as the *Phankhoatu* says, their eyelids closed.

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And now, we must state that, in no translation from Chinese into French has the Western imagination given itself such free and fanciful rein as in the various translations of *the Kan-ing*. Let us rest assured, moreover: I shall not lose myself here, any more than in the case of other Taoist texts, in those tedious philological discussions in which there is no interest whatsoever, save that of satisfying the unbearable vanity of the commentators and their zeal for bitter polemics. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the very idea of translating Far Eastern texts was an act of such commendable boldness that, for posterity, it must suffice to compensate for all errors and excuse all ignorance. This is the only statement I have the time and inclination to make, and which I feel entitled to make. And I shall pass over this quickly to congratulate myself merely on the consequences of this statement, through which one senses how colonial expansion, convenient travel, and a taste for distant sciences have facilitated the task for the workers of the 20th century.

Humanity, today, no longer maintains a storehouse of different mentalities, where, in appropriate compartments, are arranged, suitably labelled, the Latin, Slavic, Muslim, Germanic, Finnish and Greek mentalities – to mention only the compartments pertaining to little Europe. Today we have a white mentality – or thereabouts – an American mentality…, and so on. We are moving towards the day when we shall have a single type, which will be the prototype of the human brain. And so already, without sharing them, we understand, without distorting them too much, the ideas, systems and abstract concepts arising from mentalities that are not our own. This is a great advantage that French scholars of a hundred years ago did not have.

The efforts they made to assimilate the essence of Chinese thought, for example, were in vain; all their efforts were wasted in vain; they truncated and distorted this homogeneous thought within the differently constructed mould of the European mind; and they only managed to understand it once it had been disfigured by all the heterogeneous elements they had added to it, and so disfigured that the Chinese, who had originally conceived it, would not have been able to recognise it. And this work of obfuscation and disintegration was all the more necessary and considerable in that the specific Chinese thought, which was to be assimilated, was all the more foreign and antithetical to French thought.

Yet the *Kan-ing* is, in the original doctrinal thesis, the very antithesis of the Western belief in any future destiny, and seems particularly incomprehensible to that section of the white race which has founded its religion, its morality and its entire conception of humanity upon the parallel and dualistic existence of good and evil as equals, and on the rewards and punishments which the Lord reserves for those who, during this life, have accomplished what, according to men, is good or evil; that God should thus be reduced to the role of executioner of the high deeds of his creatures is not likely to astonish the mind of one born amidst European imaginings; but that Mr Julien and his colleagues should have been so determined to insert, into their translations from the Chinese, these tyrannical and barbaric theories, which were never included there, this is bound to surprise even those who are aware of the vain ignorance of our official scholars, but who, having studied Chinese texts in China under the guidance and explanation of Chinese masters, know full well that there can be nothing true or plausible in such adaptations.

If Western sinologists knew almost nothing of Eastern philosophy, they were at least obliged, by virtue of the philological science that had admitted them to the Institute, to respect the meaning and concept of the ideographic characters, even if these concepts remained abstruse to them. But these scholars cared little for such modest piety; they would only agree to translate the Chinese text on condition that they might paraphrase it to clarify and improve it—or so they believed, at least. Through much effort and refinement, France received, from the hands of several members of its Academies, a translation of *the Kan-ing*, whose continuous and deliberate misinterpretation is evident and encapsulated in the philosophical barbarism by which even the book's title was distorted.

Indeed, the *Kan-ing* was translated and is still known in Europe under the title *The Book of Rewards and Punishments*; as if, instead of being a summary of the most abstract metaphysics, the *Kan-ing* were a rigorous penal code for use by courts-martial, or any other apparatus of so-called human justice. And so the character *Kan* would signify: *rewards*, and the character *ing* would signify: *punishments*, meanings that neither has ever had, not even approximately. I do not presume to dispel such a gross and total, yet universal, error, backed by the unshakeable authority of two scholars adorned with green uniforms and multiple decorations. A lie enshrined by such long usage is very close to being a truth, and so the new continent

will always be called America, even though it is generally believed that it was Christopher Columbus who discovered it.

And besides, even if I were to replace that title with 'The Book of Sanctions', I would merely be substituting a half-truth for an error. In fact, I am merely translating, and imperfectly at that, the character *'ing'*; to be even roughly accurate, one would have to translate it as: *The Book of Actions and Corresponding Reactions*, and devote a whole volume to explaining everything that this title implies. Let us replace it with a few brief but substantial reflections.

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These reflections will at the same time constitute the best commentary with which we can accompany the *Kan-ing*—not that *Kan-ing* considerably expanded in quantity and diminished in quality by the *Taoists* who could not escape the influence of Confucian and Buddhist society, but that Taoist *Kan-ing*, consisting of a few extremely brief and obscure lines, which devout disciples inherited from Laozi himself, and which they recorded in ideograms after their Master's passing.

For I am not expected to paraphrase, with useless and redundant exegeses, the precepts of pure and simple morality found in *the Kan-ing*, nor the four hundred childlike and good-natured stories that aroused the enthusiasm of Mr Stanislas Julien. These texts, commendable and clear, are perfectly self-sufficient, are understood at first reading, and do not, moreover, deserve to hold the researcher's attention for any longer. Let us pay a brief tribute to the sincere sentiments of the commentators on *the Kan-ing*, and let us reserve our devotion and prolonged contemplation solely for the authentic teachings, whose metaphysical value, as well as the endorsement of relevant scholars, attests to their veracity and lofty origin.

'Actions and Corresponding Reactions' – the only adequate translation of the title of the final text by Laozi himself – encapsulates in embryo and determines the entire Taoist doctrine concerning what we in the West, and in Christian terminology, call good and evil, as well as human responsibility and the sanctions applied to that responsibility. For a full explanation of the nature of this responsibility and the consequential value of these sanctions, I refer the reader to The *Metaphysical Way*, where the subject is, it seems to me, dealt with at some length. Let us consider here only the direct and indirect effects of the actions performed by humanity, endowed with this limited responsibility.

Let us note straight away, to our great satisfaction, though no doubt to the chagrin of all those for whom the doctrines of an opposing concretism are practically and materially comfortable, how much the Taoist dogma agrees here in substance, and even in method, and sometimes even in form, with the secret teachings of the West and with the purest Kabbalah. Manichaeism, which was a lamentable error only through an excess of frankness, and for having sought to give too

importance and personality to the enemy it sought to combat and destroy, Manichaeism bore dark and unintended fruits; it appears that, thanks to human imperfection and misunderstanding, it achieved a goal opposite to that intended by its founder; it is nonetheless true that it was from this inverted understanding, which infested even the Catholic Church that excommunicated it, that all the Western distortions of a truth in itself very simple arose. But, apart from this sect and those who, whilst destroying it, belonged to it without realising it, the true doctrine remained amongst initiatory groups, amongst secret colleges and associations of pious and modest scholars; and it remained even in the depths of that superficial Manichaeism which was condemned and for which the Order of the Templars was made to atone so dearly. In every place and at every time in the world, the luminous truth I am about to summarise has been understood and carefully concealed within the rarest and most exalted minds, for it was destined to remain unknown to the agnostic multitude. This torch, which has delighted the eyes of all that was great in the universe, was lit by Taoist hands; and it was Laozi who, first of all, brought forth, from the Promethean myths, the light by which this torch shone and burned. This is indisputable to any mind capable of thinking impartially, above all passion; and here we must give the Chinese Sage his due, namely, the priority of knowledge of the Arcane by which all humanity acts, suffers, and, according to its asceticism, fears death or desires it.

Acts which men commit within the bounds of their responsibility, but in full human knowledge, cannot be regarded merely as material facts bringing about a temporary alteration to a physical order which is itself essentially transient.

They are not merely the reflected effects of human will, capable of producing moral consequences and causing disruption or improvement in social functions or in relations between individuals.

They are also – they are above all – emissions of energy, psychic efforts, displacements of nervous and immaterial forces, shifts in equilibrium within the statics and dynamics of the invisible world, and deviations of currents within the aura of humanity. These phenomena of our secondary nature are as undeniable, as certain in their consequences, as the phenomena of variations in weight, density and mass that we observe in our immediate nature; but because they are invisible – generally speaking, at least – and because they occur in a realm where man’s five senses can exercise only a fleeting and wholly exceptional control, these phenomena, which do not present themselves to our attention in a tangible form, are unknown to the masses, and are counted as nothing, or almost nothing, by those very people who have most vehemently suspected their existence.

Yet these are precisely the most significant phenomena that human action can give rise to; they are the only ones that endure, and which, through a interplay of reciprocal and perfectly coordinated movements, possess a perpetual existence; they alone have an effect on every level, an echo in every world, and bear within them that quality of permanence which, in essence, must normally be inherent in everything

a man says, thinks or does, an infinitesimal but certain fragment of that ineffable Whole of which Eternity is a dimension.

This paramount and overriding importance of the purely psychological movements of action is determined as easily as is possible; for the material consequences of human action cannot extend beyond matter, either in time or in space; they are therefore expressly limited to the very plane on which the act was committed; and, consequently, they are null and void outside the human gaze.

Similarly, the moral or logical consequences of a voluntary act cannot exceed the limits within which the will operates and within which the perpetrator's responsibility is recognised. We have discussed at length elsewhere how the very status of present-day humanity[2] restricts freedom, responsibility and, consequently, punishment to the realm between life and death for the individual, and between the pre-human and post-human states for the species. The considered consequences of human will have the same limits as stasis, beyond which this will is no longer distinct, or, in any case, is no longer the will as we know it, and which defines us as human beings… And these two observations, apart from being the logical outcome of perfectly clear reasoning, devoid of any ambiguity or possible detours, are entirely natural, since, whether on the material plane or the volitional plane, man, in acting, has influenced only things within man's power, or feelings belonging to the human realm.

But, if we consider the act as a dispenser of energy and, consequently, as an emitter of nervous vibrations into the psychic atmosphere, as a propeller of a wave in the fluidic ocean that bathes us and the universe, we immediately realise that the movement thus produced, operating beyond the human plane, escapes our control, our reach, and even our responsibility (at least insofar as it is the limited responsibility of the human condition). And the typical characteristics of these movements must be borne in mind: they are not controllable by us; once emitted, they escape our influence forever; finally, and although, as 'current reversals' occur, the current diminishes in intensity until it becomes imperceptible, the series of movements is nonetheless known[3] .

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But, without dwelling on these characteristics, which I might, so to speak, describe as external, let us see, in essence, what such phenomena are, or rather let us try to express clearly the little we can conceive of them. For, all

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[2] Cf. The *Metaphysical Path*, chap. VII.

[3] It should be noted that, to define the nature of these psychic waves, we have no better terms than those applied to electrical forces and Hertzian waves. One may draw whatever parallels one wishes.

Even with the firm resolve to remain clear and precise, it is not possible for a person to fully understand or thoroughly analyse facts that do indeed originate from them, but which, once they have originated from him, leave the realm of his actual realities never to return, or, at least, to return only after having undergone, at the hands of agents unknown to us, profound changes in degree, and even in nature.

The human act, regarded as a source of energy radiating outwards from the volitional seed that engendered it, affects everything that is of its nature, that is to say, everything that is humanity, and everything that is energy. This is axiomatic; and indeed, even if, to crude observations such as those available to human nature, such a correspondence goes unnoticed, it is no less true that it always exists, and that the emission, however infinitesimal, of any energy will in some way affect universal energy, just as the smallest of all numbers will affect the greatest of all sums to which it is added. This is a mathematical necessity, just as it is a logical necessity. But what do we really know of this universal energy which human actions affect in so many different ways? We know it in such a general sense that concrete and empirical minds have an easy time of disputing even its very existence. Let us not dwell on this, however: the latest scientific discoveries – the energy waves of the ether, the material yet invisible radiant energy – have amply demonstrated that we live in a sea of universal potential force, and that we are, in short, the objects through which this potential energy becomes actual energy, under certain conditions, on every plane. But, whilst demonstrating the existence of this indefinite and infinitely practical omnipotence, science, still entirely experimental, has specified neither its value, nor its subject, nor the conditions of its action, application and transformation. We are only now learning of the existence and a few rare details of this great problem; we do not yet see its discussion and resolution assured.

It is in this energetic realm, still entirely unknown save for the affirmation of its existence, that all the partial energies emitted by the series of human actions will converge, without being lost or annihilated. What do we know of the way in which they behave there? And of the result produced by their encounter and their summation? Nothing yet; but let us consider them right up to their entry into this mysterious world, that central athanor where all that is force is forged; and let us endeavour, through analogical reasoning, to grasp them upon their emergence.

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We have just acted, whether a simple gesture or a more complex action, which matters little; let us assume that we have just performed the archetypal act, the unit of action, that is to say, the act corresponding to the number *one* on all the planes where it manifests itself.

This act, apart from the physical movement and the consequent moral impression, displaces energies and utilises forces, and does so in two ways, and always in these same two ways, whatever the act produced. The will that has

determined the act is an emission of force, intellectual or spiritual, as one wishes (and I say this so as not to burden the discussion with irrelevant considerations). A force, unless emitted into a vacuum, has resultants of the same nature as itself, but of varying magnitudes and directions. Voluntary movement is therefore projected and inscribed in the plane of ideas, and in the particular aura that the human being in question has created for themselves through the series of their preceding acts of will.

On the other hand, the energy generated by the will to perform an action is not exhausted by that action; it is merely utilised in it. Once the action has been performed, the temporary purpose for which this energy was generated and held in reserve disappears, but the energy emitted does not disappear; it does not return to the centre that projected it, nor is it reabsorbed there. For if we could, as the Patagonian does with his lasso and the Zealander with his boomerang, draw back to ourselves the energies we have projected outwards, we would no longer know fatigue, hunger or the need for sleep; we would have discovered perpetual motion on the psychological plane, and it is quite likely that, moreover, we would have solved the problem of the individual's immortality.

If the energies emitted from the individual do not return to it, once they no longer have any purpose outside (whether they have failed, or whether they have reached and fulfilled their purpose), and since, on the other hand, we cannot conceive of either their loss or their annihilation, we are compelled to conclude that, alongside voluntary energy, they will become part of the ocean of fluidic forces that surrounds all created things, all boundaries. Thus each of the energies emitted joins with the external energies, of the same nature and of the same kind as itself.

But the divergence in value and character of these energy masses, external to man, becomes immediately apparent. Indeed, the successive impulses of the individual will, whilst being projected beyond their author, remain marked by his special imprint, and constitute for him, outside himself, a distinct centre with a personal aura, of which he is truly the relative and contingent creator, and which binds him to his human composition, and which affects him, which lives above him and for as long as he does. The limit imposed on the freedom of each individual does not permit a more complete and lasting external creation; but the identical freedom of the neighbouring individual does not allow the former to interfere, even if he wished to, in the similar creation of another. And thus the voluntary emissions of each human composite form personal energy auras, as distinctly separate from one another as the human composites themselves to which they correspond.

On the contrary, the successive influxes of psychic energy, originating from an element of the human being lower than that which constitutes the mark of personality, do not remain personal once they have left the individual and become detached from the goal towards which the individual directed them. For whilst the energies of human will have no equivalent outside of man, psychic energies, emanating from man and considered apart from him, are forces similar to all psychic forces, whose ether vibrates indefinitely. They therefore have no distinctive mark, and they normally merge into the universal fluidic ocean

, that is to say, they add to the total of dynamic energies condensed around the human race, ever since the first act was performed by the first representative of that race.

Let us therefore bear in mind that every human act has two vibrations, both of which are, of course, contingent: one, always distinct, in the volitional soul of each individual; the other, always general, in the universal psychic soul. The firm attachment of our mind to these two concepts will enable us to enter with confidence into a realm hitherto little explored.

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The aura of man's individual wills is the sum of the external projections of all his reasoned acts; it is like an enveloping atmosphere that immediately surrounds each individual, adapts to him, and receives an impression of all his deliberate movements. This aura exists only with human individuality – that fragment of our personality – and only through it; it comes into being, not even with the individual, but with his first act, which does not necessarily coincide with his birth; it grows and is continually nourished, throughout human life, by each of the individual's reasoned shifts; it is unique to him, and cannot be adapted to any other individual of the species; it lives only through successive emissions from the source that gives it existence, the individual will, and the consequent acts; it cannot therefore survive after the disappearance of its origin, any more than a flame can after the source of light has dried up.

However, whilst the original contingency of this aura imposes such limitations of time and space upon it, it also establishes certain conditions of *resonance* and *feedback*. The individual's will, the sole generator of this special aura, constitutes within it the immaterial sum of their efforts and directions; it creates a secondary entity there, which is their own exclusive work, and for which they are therefore directly and entirely responsible. This aura, with its limitations, is the true image and the exact representation of the responsibilities incurred by relative human independence. It clothes the individual in a dynamic layer that is more or less dense, more or less beneficial, depending on the intensity and directions of the voluntary actions from which it arises and from which it emanates and grows every day. On this plane of mental energy, it is therefore similar to the nervous aura which moves, following other laws, within our psychic atmosphere, and which the old illustrators depict, around the body and especially the head, as an enveloping, luminous halo. Let us bear this situation firmly in mind; it sheds light on the deepest and most frequently repeated precepts of Taoism.

On the other hand, the universal psychic aura is the place where all immaterial or pseudo-immaterial fluidic energies meet, interpenetrate and influence one another (for who can say where matter ends, or indeed whether it begins and ends anywhere)[4] arising from actions of all kinds emitted by every conceivable source (human reasoning, cosmic or even chemical actions, animal movements, etc., etc.). This energetic atmosphere is not, however, constituted by the sum total of all these diverse energies; it is neither a totality nor an entity; it is a *place* (in the manner of geometric places). It is impersonal; it is the lesser image of the Great Energetic Whole, whose Being unfolds in universal act and movement [5] . A receptacle of all forces, the slightest of those entering it alters the dispositions and movements of those it finds there; and it receives from them, in reaction and pressure, the equivalent of what it brings in actions and impressions. But here (and one senses this deeply in the cosmic and universal nature of the environment) human will has no part in it; human independence and action are nil; the value and responsibility of human action are equal to zero. The phenomenon of cosmic energy proceeds rigidly, logically, inevitably, and the one who has triggered it—whether from another world or from the depths of an individuality—is unaware not only of the conditions but of the very existence of this emission, which is necessary yet anonymous, and is therefore neither its author nor its witness. The human cannot emerge from the human realm, nor assume qualities that are not of human nature. That which lies beyond our understanding and our condition is beyond our intention and our merit. This cannot be emphasised enough, especially in the Western world, where vanity has led us to assume that our value and our responsibility are equal to the value and the very will of the Infinite.

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In the study—so delicate and complex—of energies displaced or influenced by human action, we have thus reached the point where the mysterious force thus generated has been recorded in the universal psychic centre, at the moment when this

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[4] Provided that one is willing not to reserve this term exclusively, as the ancient Western philosophers did, for that which fell within the scope of the five human senses in their normal state.

[5] Although we are here considering only two foci of energy and forces, it must be borne in mind that dualism, in any degree or of any kind, has no place in the traditional conceptions of the Far East. The primordial tradition teaches us of the third ocean, or *the ocean of Nirvana*; within this, which is energy par excellence—that is to say, the spiritual soul of all things—there is neither action nor reaction; there is no influence from human will, nor, indeed, from cosmic movements. And this essential characteristic immediately shows why there is no question of this third centre, in and around the *Kan-ing*. No movement of the universe is reflected there; but the universe, through the power of intense desires, can rise up into it and merge with it; and it is there that it finds its fulfilment, in the absolute knowledge of itself and in the possession of the Essential Energy, which is Reflective Rest, or, metaphysically, Non-Action, conscious Non-Being.

It was interesting to emphasise this point, although it was not the main issue here, regarding the parallels that the primordial Tradition offers here with the theories of Kabbalah. One will easily recognise, in what we have just said, the world contained within the spiral of the Great Serpent, the *Sepher Yetzirah*, the Treasury of Light, etc., all intellectual entities where the Far East, the East and the West meet, interpenetrate and support one another.

This wave has, without merging or annihilating itself, united with that ocean which bathes the universes. Just as a body falling into water, or a river animated by its own movement flowing into an ocean endowed with the planetary movement of the tides, this energy causes ripples that propagate in all directions. But a ripple that spreads generates a reaction, necessary for any kind of equilibrium, be it material, psychic or intellectual. This is why the wave-like vibration, after having affected the entire psychic ocean, returns to the very place where it originated, with a new value and direction, regarding which we humans have any certain data, nor even conceivable data (for the influences encountered by the wave in the psychic ocean lie beyond the human realm, and form part of a cosmic whole whose active elements we do not know).

Here we have only elements of reasoning and analogy; we have no elements of experience or observation, and we must be content with what we have in order to attempt to explain what we see: we can therefore draw here, in this realm where contingency still reigns, only relative conclusions, contingent upon a limited and reduced truth, whereas, in the world of metaphysical abstractions, we could draw rigid and clear conclusions, whose qualities were borrowed from the very perfection of their object[6] .

Be that as it may, the energy generated by human action, and carried to the extreme of its action (*kan*), returns, through a universal and obligatory cosmic mechanism, from which nothing that exists can escape, since this mechanism is the very substance of existence; and this return of energy immediately constitutes the cosmic reaction (*ing*) to human action.

This reaction is obviously of the same nature as the undulation from which it arose; it bears the same characteristics; the cosmic movements it may set in motion are independent of man, of his will, of his merit; he is unaware of them; they are indifferent to him and he to them. An impersonal wave of the universal ocean, it concerns man only at the very moment and point where it comes to stir, through its similar and parallel rebound, the human aura from which it once emerged. We can only scientifically study that moment and that point of such a reaction; but let us be aware that this moment and this point are affected in the same way and with the same indifference as all other points and all other moments in the course of this cosmic reaction. And, at this point and at this moment, this reaction changes in nature: it loses its universal character at the very place where it had acquired it, to take on this form of individual action, through which alone it can enter and act within human auras. And, in losing its impersonal characteristic,

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[6] We do not wish to dwell on this. Yet what a profound subject for reflection it is: the realisation that we know and feel we can approach absolute truth through that which is eternal and divine within us, whilst at the same time we feel and acknowledge that the limitations of which we are, nevertheless, made remain obstacles to our understanding of those very limitations. And what an unexpected realisation that, despite our superficial imperfection, we are more open to the absolute than to the relative!

It takes up the characteristics of individual contingency, which it had abandoned upon leaving that contingency, and which it rediscovers upon reintegrating into it.

Let us therefore return, with this reaction (*ing*), to human time and space. In this period, it follows the exact opposite path to that which the *kan* had taken within the human aura, from the moment it emerged from the energetic vulva of the will. And so *the ing* comes, as a reactant, to affect the human individual with a power commensurate with the value of *the kan's* original emission; but, to affect a compound, an energy must take on, if not essentially, then at least temporarily, qualities that the compound to be moved can feel and perceive, and appreciate in its nature, and control through its judgement. This is why, at this moment of return to the human, the *kan* assumes the human qualities through which it can effectively present itself to its object. These qualities are of a material nature and of a sentimental nature, so that the result may take effect upon the entire human composite (let us note once more that we are not speaking here of the divine elements of man, which could not, if not be moved, at least find contentment only in communion with the ocean of nirvana, and that there can be no question here of that ocean, which we have said is not subject to the flow of *the kan* and the influence of *the ing*).

We therefore conceive it as a logical necessity that, during its reciprocal influence upon humanity, *the ing* is temporary and contingent, individual and affective. It seizes man, not in the higher elements, but rather in the composite that is the characteristic of humanity, and it stirs him tangibly and materially. And, just as we have already established that, within the human aura, responsibility for the voluntary act remains entirely and exclusively intact, we now recognise, as an inevitable corollary, that *the ing* manifests itself on the human plane, in accordance with human responsibility, as a *sanction*; but as a sanction of a magnitude corresponding to that responsibility, and within the same limits.

Ing, depending on the circumstances, thus manifests itself as either a reward or a punishment; and this manifestation, which is external to it, affects only the object and remains independent of the subject *ing*, whose response is always true to itself, whatever the consequence may be from the human perspective. Therein lies, in short, the great secret of *kan's* journey and *ing's* return. There is no divine will in this entire metaphysical mechanism that bestows a reward or punishment upon man; there is a cosmic power that unfolds, recedes, and then reverberates independently of the moral value [7]of the human volitional act; and it is the particular movement of the human aura that applies and determines, as a sanction, the specific effects of this power. Thus what is human remains human, affecting only the human, through the sole logical correspondence of actions and reactions. It now seems untenable that the finite could affect the Infinite, and that the relative could determine a state within the Absolute; above all, it seems monstrous – let us henceforth call concepts and things by their proper names – that man, capable of desire,

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[7] For how could cosmic force or metaphysical potential be influenced by human morality?

yet incapable of acting beyond the human plane, should, through his human agitation, cause annoyance to the Abstract God, and that this Abstract God should derive from this annoyance infinite satisfaction or wrath, generating eternal punishments applied to this temporary man and his illusory agitation.

I have already strongly emphasised[8] such a monstrosity: one can never return to it too often or with too much fervour; for, preached by priests eager to gain power and money from it, it has terrified millions of beings, and halted the evolutionary momentum of one of the finest human races through the mad terror of death and the worst anxieties of the Hereafter.

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Let us briefly touch upon two immediate consequences of the Taoist doctrine, which provides absolute clarity on two delicate issues: the problem of human habit (repeated responsibility) and of habit beyond the human state or any other state in the cycle (Hindu *karma*, Christian original sin), and the vexing problem of social justice in the human world, or even in the visible universe or that which is capable of being visible.

It is clear that, if we were to study all these profound and complex questions in detail, a whole volume would be required for each of them; but we would also be forced to lose ourselves in comparisons, exegeses and polemics. Such approaches have nothing to do with our method. Ours consists of setting out, as briefly as possible, what lies at the heart of the primordial Tradition, and what therefore stands every chance of being the truth, if indeed truth can be conceived by human minds. But we believe that this truth will reveal itself to be beautiful enough in its own right, to those whose eyes are worthy of contemplating it, so that we need not articulate or elaborate on its marvellous perfections. We leave the zeal of propaganda to those who need to bolster a doctrine that is not sufficient in itself to win over the souls of its adherents, and especially to those who have a personal interest in making converts.

Therefore, when questions—even the most difficult, the most controversial, the most obscure—can, in our humble opinion, be addressed with a single word, one should not be surprised to see that word written here, followed by no other.

The energy emitted by all human acts is of the same nature, but the energy emitted by a specific human act is of a degree, of a value, of a special ‘abundance’; naturally, these qualities are specific to the aura of humanity, remain within it, and cannot in any way affect that which lies outside. Thus, within the human aura, one could, by the quality and vibratory value of the energy, discern what act emitted that energy. When, after having

[8] Cf. *The Metaphysical Path*.

completed its journey through the universal aura, this energy returns, by rebound, to the individual aura; it takes on the qualities it possessed before leaving it; and, endowed with these specific qualities, it returns to affect the individual, who was its mediating cause through the act generated. And, in striking the individual, it strikes him in the qualities corresponding to his own, that is to say, in the qualities, feelings, passions and motives that generated the act which set the whole movement in motion.

We can see the consequence from this. Stirred in the qualities and on the levels that generated an act, by an energy born of that very act, man is inevitably led to act as he did before; he is urged to *repeat the* original *act*. And, if he repeats it, a series of new, analogous vibrations—but of increased intensity through repetition—resumes the round trip we have described, strikes the individual once more, in the same way but more strongly, and urges him, even more ardently, towards a fresh repetition. The same act becomes increasingly easy, natural, psychically inevitable; it even ends up being performed unconsciously. Such is the mechanical theory of habit, of ingrained habit, and, as the proverb so profoundly puts it, of *second nature*.

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Let us apply the same line of reasoning to a higher plane. As a transmitter of vibrations and a receiver of analogous vibrations, and with all these imbued with human qualities within the individual aura, one day, in the course of this normal and perpetual process, man dies. That is to say, he leaves the human plane, and his individual aura dissolves, insofar as it is imbued with human qualities.

On the higher plane[9] to which the dissociation of the human elements has projected him, the new being that is man *brings nothing of the former man*. Let us briefly consider this proposition, which would be axiomatic were it not for the fact that Westerners have deliberately allowed their minds to become clouded on all these matters: the elements of the former human composite, which are found on the new plane, are normal elements of that plane, and were therefore the higher elements of the human plane; the normal and characteristic elements of the human plane cannot leave it, otherwise they would no longer be its characteristics. Furthermore, the new plane can only be superior to the human plane on condition that it does not possess the normal elements of the latter. Given this – and it is simply common sense – one clearly understands that it is the characteristic elements of the human being that emit the act and, consequently, the energy into the human aura; for if the energy were emitted by other elements, it would not possess the special qualities required to be inscribed in the individual human aura. Therefore, everything inscribed in the individual aura originates from the characteristic human element, and all the qualities attached to it remain there exclusively. Therefore, neither responsibility, whatever its nature, nor punishment, whatever its form,

[9] Cf. *The Metaphysical Path*.

follow the higher elements of the human composite after its dissolution. This is purely mathematical. The new man does not enter his subsequent existence burdened with merits or demerits.

On the other hand, the psychic vibrations—impersonal and indifferent, yet absolutely real—which, after passing through the individual aura, traverse the universal ocean, return to their source of emission, as we have stated above: the new man thus rediscovers, in his higher state, the vibrations he once emitted, but vibrations that are purified, depersonalised, just as he himself is, and capable only of stirring within him the ardour for Life (and by *'life'* here we mean the *mode of being* of the higher plane to which man has ascended after his death). It is the totality of these universal vibrations, absorbed into a compound worthy of them, which constitutes, for the being emerging into its new state, the potential of its will, its intelligence and its feelings. This is a further consequence of the theory of repetitions: it is *habit*, depersonalised and transfigured. But it has nothing in common with human habit.

It is this potential that Western religions, ever fond of pejorative terms, call 'original sin'. Apart from the utter absurdity of seeking to hold the new being responsible for this potential, from which no one can escape, it should be noted that this potential is neither a virtue nor a sin; that it is without justification that Christians seek to make it a shameful burden upon anyone born into any world; and that it is by his own will alone, and once he has taken full possession of it, that the being in question will place a '+' or a '–' sign before this energetic potential, depending on the use he makes of it in the new existence into which he has just entered.

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Finally, let us consider, in the light of this revelation – which may seem new to our Western eyes, but which is nonetheless the first to have shone before mankind – the question of social justice and universal justice. But, unlike the rhetoricians, let us do so very briefly, and by indicating very succinctly the stages of these specific developments. We have spoken of the metaphysical, mathematical, and even moral impossibility of any form of punishment being applied to human acts beyond human life, and to any entity other than the human being. Therefore, if there is merit and demerit, if there is responsibility and punishment, if, in a word, the *corresponding reaction* must manifest itself in happiness or sorrow, it is exclusively on the human plane; and it is therefore to the letter that 'every act bears within itself its reward or its punishment'. It therefore appears that it is on the plane where the act was committed that the sanction befalls the perpetrator of the act. How can we reconcile this proposition, now necessary, with our conviction that 'justice is not of this world'? The answer to this childish objection is infinitely simple.

If we consider any act in itself, independently of everything that preceded it and everything that will follow it, we conceive of it differently from what it is

In reality, we attribute absolute values to its qualities. And consequently, we demand that a punishment be meted out to it that is equally absolute and commensurate with that act alone. Yet this view is entirely mistaken. And, without dwelling on the *law of series*—which we shall examine in a later study—we must recognise, and constantly remind ourselves of, this truth that we sense vaguely: namely, that no act is independent of the preceding and subsequent series, and that its elements of causality and responsibility have multiple and distant roots; consequently, the sanction immediately applied to it is inextricably linked not only to preceding and subsequent sanctions, but to all reactions that are not sanctions; if the sanction that appears to apply to an act seemed just to us in relation to that isolated act, it would therefore be precisely unjust, since that act is never alone; relative injustice is therefore necessary; and it is the whole series of these successive injustices that in reality constitutes the humanly appreciable portion of universal justice.

The whole social problem is contained here; and the most famous dreamers and the worst rhetoricians of anarchy will not be able to demonstrate that, on the contingent plane of humanity, the general and definitive resolution of an entire cyclical evolution can be achieved.

We need only summarise our reasoning; it applies just as well to the theory of universal justice; social justice, however unjust it may be, is an integral part of it, just as individual justice is an integral part of social justice. Thus man is an actor in the drama of universal justice; and he affects it, and is affected by it, apart from his capacity as a human being. But let us bear two things firmly in mind: 1° the energies of universal justice which affect every being outside the human realm are not sanctions, but merely psychic or cosmic influences indifferent to the human condition and to what transpires within it; 2° the evolutionary cycle is ascending; that is to say, whatever the sum of human actions may have been, whatever the repercussions of these acts in the universal ocean, the human being ascends, perfecting themselves through all their dissociations, and inevitably reaches the disappearance of the limit, or, precisely, perfection.

Neither in individual justice, nor in social justice, nor in universal justice, is the being swept along in the current of forms satisfied. For where there is justice, there is also injustice; and the idea of justice arises only with and through its opposite and complement. Therefore, as long as the being seeks justice and believes he has found it, he will not find it; for he will not be where it is; it will have reached it only when it no longer has the desire for it, nor the thought of it, because, at that very moment, it *will be*, above all qualities and all limits, and THAT alone is Infinite Justice.

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I shall end these overly lengthy reflections here, though one might have continued them, even with some interest, for hundreds of pages and through endless lines of reasoning. But I endeavour to humbly follow the example of my illustrious masters, merely pointing out the path to truth, and leaving to each individual the task and the essential merit of attempting to reach it. I believe that, if the aphorisms that follow are given sufficient attention, one will be able to find in them all the fruit one is entitled to expect from a text that is both practical and profound. One will easily discern, amidst the moral naiveties I have already mentioned, the metaphysical symbols in which the Master's thought is concealed, and how one must interpret 'the reductions of existence' which are mentioned at every turn, and of what
'existence' is in question. I shall therefore not burden a teaching—which all that has gone before sufficiently illuminates—with any further overly simplistic commentary. And I shall simply present, without the slightest interruption, the text of *the Book of Actions and Corresponding Reactions*, as Laozi conceived it, and as it was paraphrased by devout disciples and philosophers of all schools.

CHAPTER VI

The *Kan-Ing* (*Translation*)

Thus speaks the Thai-Chang: Man's fortune or misfortune on earth is not inevitably determined; through his will to act, man attracts either good or evil. Action and the reaction to that action follow him like a shadow, in proportion to their value.

There are, on earth and above the earth, intelligent forces that assess the course of human actions; depending on the slight or great influence arising from these actions, they periodically reduce the total of existence; on earth, these reductions amount to progressive poverty, then to a host of privations and sufferings, then to hatred of others, then to torments and misfortunes, then to general calamities sent by hostile planetary influences, and finally, when all periods are exhausted, to death.

There are also the three advisory spirits, and the seat of these spirits, their leader, which surround the head of man; these know the good and evil deeds of mankind, which correspond to the periods of the *ki* numbers.

There are also the three *San-Chi* spirits, who govern the inner workings of man. As soon as the day *of Keng-chin* arrives, they ascend to the palace of heaven to bear witness to the deeds of men (*Keng-chin* is the day of the magistrates' hearings).

There is also the household spirit, which, on the last day of the moon, also bears witness.

Human actions, depending on their weak or strong influence, correspond to reductions in the periodic *ki* numbers (one hundred days or twelve years).

There are a multitude of actions, whether significant or trivial, which one must carefully avoid performing in order to attain immortality. On the straight path, advance resolutely; on the crooked path, retreat resolutely.

Do not walk the crooked path. Do not deceive your heart in the depths of your will. To accumulate virtue is to amass merit. Love life with compassion. Be upright: pour out your heart; love those who came before and those who will come after. To correct oneself is to begin to transform the universe. Support those who are weak and surround those who are alone. Respect what is ancient; strengthen what is new. Protect life in all that seems inert and is changing.

One should grieve for others' faults as if they were one's own, rejoice in others' virtues as if they were one's own, rescue people from misery, protect them from danger, rejoice in what they gain, and grieve over what they lose, as if it were one's own; to conceal people's faults, not to boast of one's own merits, to oppose evil, to align oneself with good, to give up much and keep little, not to take offence at reproach, to receive goods and favours only with reverence, to do good without expecting reward, to share with others without regret.

Such a man's actions are just: all men honour him, and the Way of Heaven is in harmony with him. He is naturally followed by joy and the esteem of the great. Unpleasant consequences stay far from him; beneficial consequences surround and protect him. What he does is good and yields good results. He has a just hope of immortality.

To be immortal in the eyes of Heaven, one must perform one thousand three hundred righteous deeds; to be immortal in the eyes of the earth, one must perform three hundred righteous deeds. (One thousand three hundred signifies innumerability or continuity in habit, in the same way as the 'one thousand and one' of the Arabian storyteller or the 'one thousand and three' of Don Juan.)

To harbour unrighteous thoughts; to act without reason; to be wicked and yet consider oneself clever; to have a cruel heart and destroy life; to secretly hate the wise; to secretly despise scholars and the elderly; to revile one's teachers; to go against one's natural leaders; to deceive the simple-minded, to slander one's friends; to abuse, lie, falsify, and steal; slander one's family; be harsh, violent and lacking in solidarity; satisfy one's desires exclusively; deliberately confuse reason with its opposite; ignore what ought to be retained or abandoned; rob the weak to enrich oneself; flatter the powerful and obey them without reflection; forget the favours received; nurturing and perpetuating one's hatred; despising the lives of Heaven's children; failing to conform to the traditions of the State; bestowing honours upon the unworthy; punishing the innocent; taking the property of others; plotting the downfall of others; killing a defenceless enemy; slaughtering prisoners; exiling upright men; losing the wise; insulting the forsaken; oppressing the weak; accepting gifts to violate the laws; finding the righteous in the wrong and the unjust in the right; confusing minor faults with serious ones; sentencing to death out of passion and anger; knowing one's fault and persisting in it; knowing justice and failing to conform to it; to accuse others of one's own crime; to hinder the mechanical arts; to criticise and slander the wise; to attack and insult the Way and Virtue; to shoot arrows at birds, to hunt beasts; to chase insects; to startle sleeping passerines; to block burrows and destroy nests; killing pregnant females; destroying eggs; wishing ill upon others; undermining the merits of others; exposing others whilst protecting oneself; belittling others whilst exalting oneself; exchanging the bad for the good; pursuing one's own private interests whilst neglecting the common good; claiming the talents of others as one's own; concealing the talents of others; publicising their imperfections; revealing their secrets; encouraging them to squander their wealth; driving a wedge between the closest relatives; usurping the inheritance of others; helping others to act wrongly;

to give in to violence and abuse one's authority; to humiliate others for one's own gain; to destroy what is sprouting and what is ripe; to break up other people's relationships; to enrich oneself through extortion and boast of it; to feel no remorse for one's injustice, save for the punishment; to claim all good for oneself; to reject all evil; to claim ill-gotten glory; to harbour a treacherous heart; to slander men of great virtue; to conceal one's imperfections; to abuse one's strength to coerce and oppress; to be cruel, to torment, to wound, to take life; to waste existing resources without gain; to kill a multitude of useful animals, outside of ritual; scatter or destroy the five edible grains; overwhelm living beings with labour and hardship; ruin men and seize their property; divert waters and set fires in inhabited places; disrupt plans and destroy the work of others; destroy professional tools to prevent men from using them; to wish misfortune and exile upon those who are happy and glorious; to wish misery upon those who are rich; to recognise beauty, and to wish to secretly appropriate it for oneself alone; to wish death upon those who have done you a favour; to curse the great without success; to see others as imperfect or incomplete, and to laugh at them; to recognise intelligence and virtue, and, far from praising them and making them known, to hide them and oppose them; to fashion a likeness of a man to torment him; to poison the springs of the forests; to harbour resentment against those who have raised you; to resist and show disrespect to one's father and the elders of the family; to take by force what belongs to others; taking another's property by force or trickery; amassing wealth through theft; advancing through fraud or deceit; rewarding or punishing those who do not deserve it; indulging in excessive rest or pleasures; exploiting and oppressing one's inferiors; causing fear and revulsion; before Heaven, accusing others of one's own faults; provoking the wrath of the two principles; stirring up quarrels; uniting for an evil purpose; following the advice of women; resisting the traditions of one's ancestors; abandoning the ancient for the recent; thinking one thing and speaking another; demanding excessive advantages, and knowingly deceiving one's masters; attributing evil deeds and evil words to the wise; to denigrate others and boast of oneself; to deny influences and believe in one's own virtue alone; to renounce conformity (to the Way) and prefer rebellion; to abandon one's own people and cherish strangers; to assert one's virtue by heaven and earth, though one lacks virtue; to pray to heaven for the success of evil deeds; to give, then to regret it; to borrow and not return; to seek to rise above one's station; to make selfish use of one's strength and intelligence; to be intemperate during sacred times; a gentle face and a fierce heart; to lead the people astray from the Way: a length too short, a width too narrow, a scale too light, a vessel too small; to mix truth and error; taking undeserved advantages; plunging the most honest into abjection; deceiving trusting men; devouring and never being sated; invoking the gods to appear just; acting immoderately and against reason; harbouring resentment against one's own kin: positive without sincerity and uprightness, negative without gentleness and conformity; lacking harmony amongst women; to love to boast constantly; to be constantly jealous and envious; to behave badly towards one's descendants; to behave badly towards one's husband's ancestors; to neglect the spirits of the ancestors; to resist orders from superiors; to study and do useless things; to hide a double heart; to wish for

harming oneself and one's kin; harbouring unjust love and hatred; despising the spirits of water and fire; killing newborns or causing miscarriages; performing secret or extraordinary acts; indulging in frivolity on the days of *Hoei* and *La*; shouting and becoming angry at sunrise and on the day *of So*; deliberately bringing the negative into the presence of the positive; defiling the hearth; burning incense with unconsecrated fire; neglecting the earth's produce; doing wrong under cover of darkness and inflicting torment during the sacred times *of patsié*; reviling the falling stars; defying the rainbow, the sun, the moon and the three great lights; burning herbs in spring; reviling the north and its symbols.

The spirit that watches over human life records these faults, whether grave or minor, and matches them with reductions in the *ki* periods; when the series of reactions is exhausted, the man dies; and, if the reaction at that moment is not fully accomplished, it spreads, for good or ill, to his descendants. If a man takes what belongs to others, his children and his possessions gradually disappear; he experiences water, fire, theft, loss, illness and slander, which take from him the equivalent of his theft. A man who kills another man is like one who kills himself. The thief eats poisoned meat and drinks *tchin* wine: he seems to be sated by it; in reality, he dies from it. To wish to do good without yet acting, this is the spirit of good; to wish to do evil without yet acting, this is the spirit of evil.

If the wicked man changes his ways, refrains from acting and reflects on reason, he will attain happiness and peace: this is turning evil into good. Thus the Wise Man follows virtue in thought, word and deed; he accomplishes the three good deeds, and within three years receives happiness from Heaven. The wicked man turns away from virtue in thought, word and deed; he commits the three reprehensible acts, and within three years receives misfortune from Heaven.

One must always strive towards the good.

CHAPTER VII

Taoist Hierarchies and Secret Societies

At present, Taoist texts and books are translated accurately and illuminated with all the light that is possibly adequate for Western understanding.

It remains for us to understand how these texts were applied in the very places and among the peoples that inspired them, how the tradition was established through which these ancient teachings reached us, and in which colleges and institutions the torch of such pure light is jealously preserved.

This, then, is the history of the Taoist hierarchies, and of the shell within which these hierarchies were preserved, crystallised, and enclosed, so as to possess both anonymity and omnipotence; it is the history of the Yellow secret societies. This is not a chronological history, for revolutionary movements created secret organisations at certain times to meet the needs of those times, and these organisations disappeared after achieving their goal (and we have contemporary proof of this in the emergence of the *Boxer* sect, an exoteric and dazzling offshoot of the most occult organisation in the universe). This is merely a logical and philosophical history, examining the inevitable development of political secret societies within the very initiatory centres that Taoism had created for the preservation of the Doctrine, and for the concealment of the delicate or dangerous sciences which, from both a political and a psychological standpoint, stemmed from that doctrine.

Since Taoist initiation centres are, moreover, the sole hierarchical bodies within a tradition that knows nothing of worship, ritual, liturgy or, strictly speaking, the priesthood, they were bound to serve as a nucleus and rallying point for all the secret societies forming within the yellow race, for two main reasons: firstly, because Taoism teaches, in politics, the same principles professed by those who are compelled to resort to secret societies to preserve the independence of their thought; and secondly, because Taoism presented the implacable, yet very simple and highly occult hierarchy that is indispensable to any secret organisation worthy of the name and of existence.

We need not revisit the political principles contained in the writings of Laozi, and especially in *the Tao*. Without even needing to press the point, it is clear that they lead the individual towards libertarianism, and the community towards communism.

Thus, they will from the outset fulfil the ultimate goal to which all secret societies of humanity aspire.

But what is important to highlight here is the institution of the occult Taoist hierarchy, as it still exists today, and to specify that the mystical, magical and conservative role of each of these hierarchical levels is coupled with a political, social and evolutionary role.

Strictly speaking, the Taoist hierarchy has no priests or ministers, since there is no external worship; nor does it have salaried members—and consequently, officials—since there are no expenses; nor does it have members elected by the people or chosen by the State, since the people are unaware of it and the State does not pay. The word 'priest' is quite inappropriate here, for he does not celebrate, but teaches. Acquired knowledge is the Taoist priest's right; the masters' recognition is his investiture; his success is his consecration. He needs nothing else to be held in reverence by the learned, and to follow his hidden path in the world.

The teaching of Science – in the full sense of the word – is the sole function and the sole ceremony of Taoism. It is evident that the deliberately abstract, general and impersonal formulas in which Laozi's teaching delights require perpetual paraphrasing. This is done through a gloss, an oral tradition, which is the same wherever Taoism is taught. These scholars, known as *tongsang* (men who see clearly), who deal with metaphysics and the problems raised by Laozi's teachings, impart the classical teachings of Taoism.

Alongside them are the *phutuy*, who are distinguished from them by a traditional, solemn character. All philosophy has always been drawn to the question of the origin of the gods and the origin of the idea of God. Moreover, it gains influence if, through the mysticism of its outward forms and the hierarchical structure of its priests, it stirs the religious sentiment of the people. This is why the followers of Laozi gave their master a place in the temples, and, to honour him, established, if not rites and a liturgy, then at least a hieratic hierarchy. This hierarchy was all the easier to establish as the solitude and study, which Laozi made a duty for his disciples, gave rise to communities—some cloistered, others wandering—whose leaders quickly became spiritual superiors. It is of this institution that the present-day *phutuy* are the remnants and witnesses.

Finally, at the lowest rung of the hierarchy stand the *phap*, who, in addition to the sciences mentioned above, are versed in both sacred and profane toxicology, and particularly in all divinatory sciences, ranging from metaposcopy to siderism. Evocative rites play a major role here, in this college, which follows the teachings of the Dragon, a fantastical emblem, personifying the Middle Kingdom, supreme and omniscient master of the path of the right and the path of the left.

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How is the original and complete science, stripped of all the dross and impurities of the commentators, transmitted to *the* present-day *phaps*? How do they communicate it to their followers, who are designated successors during their lifetime? Through what practice do they obtain the power corresponding to this science? Upon what and upon whom do they exercise this mysterious power? These are, among the questions one would be entitled to ask, the only ones to which one is not entitled to answer: those who reflect may find all the more eloquence in this silence, since it is no secret that it is due to moral obligations, and also to a certain instinct for self-preservation. It is easy to understand that, according to the Eastern precept, not everything is meant to be divulged, and that one is truly worthy of obtaining knowledge only when one is capable of discovering it for oneself. There are, moreover, many other questions on which one may, without danger or hesitation, arouse Western interest; this one in particular: what are the sciences taught and practised in the three mysterious colleges I have just listed? I can affirm that nothing of what follows has yet been spoken or written.

In the college of *the tongsang* (and I use the word 'college' in the broad sense of a traditional institution), only doctors are admitted, that is to say, scholars who have attained the highest ranks in the unofficial hierarchy of the literati (the other titles being reserved for sovereigns). They are admitted to the Taoist title and to teaching only after a period of time, long or short, spent either in an obscure retreat or in one of those remote monasteries known as 'temples without doors', where they devote themselves to mystical and ecstatic practices, and where prolonged contemplation of the universe leads them into the very depths of the laws of nature. They are the absolute masters and dispensers of their teachings, which people come from far and wide to seek; and their lectures—if one may use that word for the conversations they hold in the Platonic manner—are delivered according to the composition of their audience; they modify, expand or abridge them; and sometimes, because of a single suspect listener, their lips remain sealed. They are entirely independent and entirely responsible as well, not only from a doctrinal standpoint but also in political terms; and it is their duty to ensure that no statements capable of disturbing the peace of these tolerated but unofficial schools fall into the ears of enemies or spies.

The *tongsang* generally choose to settle in large villages (8,000 to 10,000 inhabitants) at a reasonable distance from towns, in a region where life is easy, secluded enough to avoid being harassed by intruders, yet close enough to transport links so as not to impose excessively long journeys on their listeners.

The public teaching of *Tongsang* consists of the reading, paraphrasing and application of *the Tao*, the *Te* and the *Kan-ing*.

I do not have the space here to indicate the full scope of such teaching; nevertheless, it is clear that it encompasses the comprehensive study of all esotericism, from the specific origins of humankind to the consequences that thoughtful human action will have, in the future, for future origins, to which the sacred books—with the exception of the second—are declared equally applicable. All metaphysical sciences are, in fact, addressed and elucidated therein. This is not, strictly

, the entirety of the science of *the Tongsang*; but, given its public nature, it is the only part they teach.

From a political standpoint, the *Tongsang* receive, through special envoys, the secret directives of the leaders of secret societies. They know the goal towards which these leaders wish to direct the spirit of the race. And, with infinite stubbornness and skill, they shape and modify, in the appropriate direction, the public teaching of the texts. They hold, in private, closed-door meetings with a select few initiates, where they instruct these accomplices on what conduct and language to adopt once each of them returns home.

The *tongsang*, whose identities are easily discernible, are invariably consulted by the Chinese officials in the political and administrative services on the appropriate course of governance, and whenever an important measure is to be taken in the country. The provincial administration is therefore under the control and secret direction of the *tongsang*, and the officials have neither the desire nor the means to escape this.

The College of *Phutuy*, which ranks above the *Tong-sang* in the Taoist rite, is a closed college with no students, where no teaching takes place, and where one studies only. Each *phutuy* lives in isolation, if not physically, then at least intellectually. For here lies the level of knowledge that one must acquire for oneself, *and which one never acquires through another, unless one breaks the law*. The sacred texts expounded by the *tongsang* are the *phutuy's* bedside companions. But *they read them differently*; and this different way of reading, they must discover for themselves, by deducing it from the method once taught to them. Through reflection, solitude, and sometimes ecstasy, the *phutuy* achieves complete oblivion of his body, and the concentration of all his powers upon his intellect alone. Speaking not, teaching not, he is neither diluted nor distracted, and the tension of his will leads him to the highest peaks, wrapped in the cloak of isolation and indifference. It should be noted that, in order to master them, he studies the laws and secrets of nature, and that he commands external things absolutely, as he does his own body.

Barely half of *the tongsang* devote themselves to the arduous practices of *the phutuy*, after which most return to teaching the books, a task infinitely less arduous and more splendid than the mysterious and thankless obscurity of *the phutuy*, which is sometimes utilised but never commands. No public benefit comes from this intermediate college, which is, to use Laozi's words, merely a stepping stone between Science and Wisdom.

From a political standpoint, the *phutuy* are the enforcers of the occult orders cautiously disseminated by the *tongsang*. The sciences – natural and supernatural – which they possess allow them, whilst maintaining intellectual silence and isolation, to travel without arousing suspicion. Indeed, wherever they are sent, they practise the trade of *the nomadic juggler*, akin to *the taosse* or the wandering fakirism of India. It is they who, like those for whom this is their sole occupation, peddle physico-psychic phenomena that amaze crowds and foreign travellers (multiplication of coins, stopping of flowing water, pseudo-spontaneous or instantaneous germination, flowering and fruiting, apparent death

, temporary burial, etc.). Through these displays, they are able to travel, observe and scrutinise everything; though they command nothing, they see, verify, and report back to those who sent them.

But when, as a result of unceasing study and a successful mystical asceticism, the *phutuy* who perseveres in goodness finds himself in possession of the secrets and forces of nature; when, strengthened by his will, he severs the last ties that still obscurely bound him to the world, he then spontaneously rises to the summit of the hierarchy, becoming *a phap*; and this volunteer, unknown to men, may then reappear among them, radiant with wisdom and power.

The *phap* is no longer a dogmatist like the *tongsang*, nor a contemplative like the *phutuy*, nor a sedentary figure like the members of the other ranks; he is essentially an active and wandering figure; his dignity makes activity his duty, and his activity makes instability his necessity. One will gradually grasp the correlation between these obligations. The *phap* is a powerful and revered being, whose effective influence is doubled by the people's fearful admiration. He has no fixed abode nor ancestral lands, his vow compelling him to the most complete detachment from the earthly realm.

In addition to the sacred texts, the *Phap* possesses the secrets of the ancient Chinese's hieratic toxicology, a science that forms a formidable arsenal in the hands of those who know how to wield it.

The *Phap* possesses the ancient treatises on phrenology and palmistry, condensed into a few substantial pages, and illustrated by very ancient and devout artists, whose art, both naive and profound, would be a source of public admiration.

It possesses the divinatory wisdom of *the Yijing* (the first sacred book of the Chinese, composed by the disciples of Fohi, some eight centuries before Moses); it possesses the formidable medicinal secrets that render the flora and minerals of China by turns a marvellous panacea and a dreadful abyss of pitfalls. But the true hallmark of *the phap* is the knowledge and practice of the precepts of *the Phankhoatu*[1] .

From a political standpoint, the *phap* is always an influential member, not only of secret societies, but very often of the inner councils of these societies. He is highly influential in the deliberations where political plans and orders are devised. It is the *phap* who is charged with transmitting these orders to the *tongsang*; he is, in reality, the delegate of the inner councils, the tangible expression of the will of the secret societies. Under the pretext of apostolate, he travels the country as a wandering monk; he commands in his own right and ensures that orders are carried out before his eyes. Nothing can be done without him; for the secret society always remains secret; only the *phap* is visible, and then only to a very limited extent.

[1] The illiterate, out of ignorance, and Christians, out of hatred, give it the nickname *Phan-ac* (book of evil things, of witchcraft, of phantasmagoria).

The Phankhoatu.

The *Phankhoatu*, literally 'book of things in return', is better described by the more general term 'Book of Reversal'. One would search in vain for it in the bibliographies of sinologists. Almost the entire Western world is unaware of its existence; no foreigner has ever deciphered its characters. Only the *phap* possess a copy each, and it is the dying master's duty to reduce it to ashes. The eldest *phap* keeps, written in red lead with a brush upon the brilliant, iridescent leaves of *the* Imperial *Gio*, the sole copy that must not be destroyed, and from which copies are made as and when required.

One will understand that it is no easy matter for a European—I do not merely mean to see this book, but even to have the vaguest notion of its existence and of what it contains. It is not fitting for any of those whom chance or circumstances may have brought, however slightly, into its knowledge, to appear to be familiar with the text. But one may know that it is here that the most formidable secrets of Far Eastern science are gathered, and that the means by which men may utilise all powers are briefly outlined, as in a memorandum.

The *Phankhoatu* is divided into two parts, comprising sixteen of these slim volumes, with which sinologists are well acquainted. The first part is like a summary of the metaphysics and earlier teachings; it serves as an introduction and teaches nothing new. It is from this preface, the narthex of a closed temple, that one can only, for the general interest, extract a few sentences. Here is the exact translation – made from the characters in the book, and based on the guidance of a scholar in the know – of the third page of this preface, where one will easily recognise, and with admiration, the androgynous theory, expressed with astonishing energy and conciseness, and with contrasts of worlds and words that cannot be emphasised enough:

'You shall adore your left side, where your heart lies.

'You shall hate your right, where your liver and your courage lie.

"But you will adore your right, where your brother's left lies."

'You shall worship your brother's left side, where his soul resides.

'You shall forsake your brother's soul for the spirit of his left.

"Thus shall the Dragon bite you in your left breast.

"And through his bite, God shall enter.

"The voice, without the word; understanding, without the sound; sight, without the object; possession, without the touch:

"These are the drops of blood from the bite.

"To pray with silent lips, to believe with closed ears, to command with submissive eyes, to take with motionless hands:

"That is the dragon's bite."

'Sleep is the master of the senses and of souls.

"Thus your head rests upon your brother's heart.

"The left side of his body responds to the left side of your mind.

"The right side of your mind responds to the right side of his body.

"Let your left penetrate his left; let your right be penetrated by his right.

"Thus your thought shall be his thought, and his blood shall be your blood."

'The Dragon's bite will heal; it will take flight, and you will be hidden within its wings.

"You shall be united with the heavens.

"Thus, you are two, – and one, – and the Ancient God" [2] .

Toxicology occupies one section of the Book; but here we are no longer concerned with all poisons, nor even with the poisons studied by scholars, to which I alluded earlier, but only with certain essences which are no longer regarded there as poisons, but as *remedies*; hemp, upas, coca vines, the juices of laurels and manchineel trees, datura, and, in general, all Euphorbiaceae. A section is devoted to the practical use of *specific* hashish and opiates, and to the description and analysis of the circumstances in which one of these agents should be used in a particular way. One might think that factors of such importance would not be brought into play for trivial purposes; and I believe that, merely from the list of plants thus studied, one will have understood what they are used for.

The other sections of *the Phankhoatu* examine, from a perspective that is readily apparent:

perfumes, including musk, benzoin, star anise, ginseng, hackberry, sandalwood, and the fumes of essences, vines, ferns, trees and poisonous reeds;

phenomena of a lower or intermediate order, temporary and superficial, classified in the West under the term 'Spiritualism';

the rational establishment of the existence of Wandering Forces, the uncoordinated powers of the soul of things, their nature, their fleeting constitution and their singular abilities;

how to recognise their presence, the favourable moment for their capture and the means of such capture;

the method of using these forces, the determination of the purposes for which it is permissible to set them in motion; their return to their wandering and vague state (decoagulation);

the demonstration of the actual possibility of complete human externalisation; preliminary training, material preparation, physical aids, rites, and essential precautions before, during and after the operation, suitable locations;

the dangers of these practices, the voluntary risk to the practitioner, the domination of foreign powers or of adequate powers poorly dispersed after use, the

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[2] *Phankhoatu*, Preface, paragraph VI.

special afflictions resulting from these special cases, and their cure by a third party, to the detriment of a third party; the phenomena of backlash;

rites, the astronomical determination of auspicious times (a sort of liturgical *Leviticus* of Taoism);

power over nature (lower world), powers over one's peers (middle world), influences over the undetermined (upper world);

Divination; Evocation;

Birth and the laws governing the act of Conception; Death and the laws of a happy death.

It is pointless – and perhaps inappropriate – to go into detail about these last chapters.

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Such is the current hierarchy, the science, and the duties of esoteric Taoism. I mentioned earlier that these rather complicated rites and secret practices are performed in the deepest mystery, and that the formulas are studied with the utmost care, the foremost of which is solitude. These forces, to which Europeans have given various names (electricity, magnetism, polarisation, hypnosis and enchantment according to Rochas, vital forces according to Baraduc, suggestion, exteriorisation, etc.), are experimented with far from any prying eyes; and the Masters alone possess the key granting access to these dangerous treasures. Disciples are bound to secrecy; this is therefore a perfectly closed society. These closed groups, bound by a ritual oath, led by men of extraordinary intelligence, to whom Laozi's doctrine commanded contempt for kings and the great, formed a ready-made nucleus for malcontents of all kinds seeking to unite and coordinate their sentiments. To win Taoism over to their cause—which was already part of it in theory—the malcontents became Taoists, and the fusion of disdainful mystics and dissident politicians is now complete. The masters of the teaching have become party leaders.

The ritual by which the *phap* combine these two formidable functions has already been published once in Europe; that is why I take no risk in reproducing it here. In a temple, they take a consecrated statue of the *goddess* Quang-Am, paint it with *white* lacquer, and bury it across the threshold of their dwelling (Formula: *An lau do thuong bach Phât xâ ghi*). I shall refrain from providing a translation of this formula here, and leave it to inventive minds to discern the precise meaning of the symbol.

Let us note how precisely the political duties imposed on the *tongsang*, the *phutuy* and the *phap* correspond to the duties of their Taoist mystical asceticism. This asceticism commands them to lead a way of life such that they can, without altering it in any way,

fulfil their political and social obligations; and it is in this that the perfection and flexibility of this entire occult mechanism lie.

The reasons for the founding of secret societies are ethnic and philosophical, even before they are economic, social and evolutionary.

It is known that, in China and Indochina – the two 'Yellow' countries where secret societies flourish most – the national dynasties have long since been overthrown and languish in exile, surrounded by legendary memories and vague ambitions. For nearly six hundred years, the Celestial Empire, invaded by the Manchus, sons of Genghis Khan, has been ruled by the descendants of its conquerors. Not a single important position at Court, from the highest office down to that of the lowliest interpreter, is left to the natives. And, although the defeated race—more intelligent, numerous and unyielding—has long since absorbed the victorious race, the anger that shook the Chinese race at the fall of the emperors still persists today through its effects.

It was in the 14th century, six hundred years after the persecution of Shi Huangdi, from which Taoism emerged triumphant, and eighteen hundred years after the appearance of Laozi (637 BC), that the Manchu conquest took place. At exactly the same time, on the southern peninsula of Asia, under the blows of the Burmese and the Siamese, the Khmer Empire in Cambodia collapsed, and the Red Kings, who reigned at Angkor, the city of a thousand palaces, whose ruins, piled up in a circle 72 kilometres in circumference, still fill visitors today with a sense of reverent wonder. Oppressed by the victors, the peoples turned to secret societies (which until then had existed in accordance with the mystical, magical and politically theoretical teachings of Laozi), from which they hoped to find solace for their sorrows and sustenance for their hopes; and it was during this era, rife with conspiracies, that the mysterious societies extended across the whole of Yellow Asia a 'claw' that is now all-powerful, and which will never again loosen its grip.

Towards the middle of the 18th century, Annam, which had until then remained relatively peaceful thanks to the Lê, the glorious kings of the national and liberating dynasty, was plunged into internal revolutions which, from 1870 onwards, : from this emerged a new dynasty, that of the Nguyens, a Cochinchinese dynasty, against which the entire peninsula rose up, and which owed its continued reign solely to foreign complicity. The pirate movements from which the French protectorate in Tonkin suffers today stem from this political upheaval, and it is also from this that we must attribute the entry of the Tonkinese and Annamites into the special secret societies which secretly unite, against the governments that chance has imposed upon them, the peoples of the yellow race. This is the primary cause of the tremendous spread of secret societies in China and Indochina; no doubt, many of those who belong to them today do not trace their membership back to this distant pretext. Nevertheless, this is a fundamental reason for the associations, and it is here that we must seek and acknowledge their powerful rise.

Another cause, and one that has always existed, lies in the very nature of the race. It is well known that the sentiment common to all Chinese is that of solidarity (*gen*). This

solidarity is practised amongst compatriots in the most ingenious ways (the establishment of numerous joint ventures, the eradication of poverty through the sharing of certain lands, interest-free loans, etc.). However, due to the prolific nature of the race, a large number of Chinese emigrate every year. What becomes of this solidarity once beyond the borders? The Chinese Empire has neither the inclination nor the means to protect its emigrant subjects. And yet, the exiled, isolated Chinese man always retains a burning desire to remain connected to his country and to eventually return to his native land, where his most ancient traditions command him to be buried. The bond they cannot find anywhere else is provided by secret societies: there is no Chinese person outside the Empire who does not belong to one or the other, and especially to that which represents and upholds the interests of the race throughout the world.

Finally, the system of government, advocated by the Sages and put into practice by the sovereigns, grants the greatest independence to officials and leaves the governed with the least possible recourse; to rightly enjoy such authority and such freedom, there would need to be only honest officials; unfortunately, there are few of them, and the Empire is rife with the most flagrant abuses. Here again, secret societies are the natural protectors of those who have been wronged, who, because of the regulations, cannot seek redress anywhere. And the fear they inspire deters many magistrates from committing malfeasance.

Given these three causes, one need no longer be surprised at the enormous influence of secret societies, nor that these associations have more members in Asia than there are inhabitants in Europe.

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Two associations meet the race's two needs—solidarity and protection—one uniting the Chinese of China with the emigrants, the other whose aims fulfil the *primary purpose* of its establishment.

I shall not speak here of the two great associations of which non-Chinese may commonly be members, one of which, extending to the north, is already known in America and Europe, and the other, to the south, encompassing Malacca, Malaysia, the Dutch and Spanish colonies, which plays its part in the Philippine uprising, and which bears the general name of *the Claw*. It was to the latter that the Frenchman Marie de Mayréna belonged, who was for a time king of the Sedang, and who perished mysteriously, for having broken his oaths, on a deserted stretch of the coast of Borneo. Of these two societies, Father Huc, other missionaries and travellers have already spoken at length.

There are two others, better concealed, more Chinese in character, and whose aims and methods have drawn upon them the wrath of the law: these laws prohibit both their political and their mystical aims.

Here is the text of the code promulgated in 1811 by King Gia-long:

‘Anyone who dares *to worship the heavens* or the stars, and who *burns incense* at night, or who lights the seven celestial lights, shall be punished with 80 strokes of the bamboo rod.

“If a *Buddhist* monk or a *Taoist* priest, after fasting, *writes an invocation* to heaven, or if they offer a sacrifice to *the spirit of fire* accompanied by an invocation, they shall be sentenced to 80 strokes and stripped of their dignity.

“Any individual who practises magic arts, claims to command good or evil spirits, *draws magical signs*, *prepares charms* using water, predicts the future, worships false saints *or belongs to the Society of the White Water Lily* or *that of the True Ancestor*, or professes any foreign or erroneous doctrine, or who, *burning incense sticks* before images of evil spirits, gathers people to worship these images at night, shall be sentenced *to strangulation*; his accomplices to 100 strokes of the cane and to distant exile” [3] .

It should be noted that, later in this article, sacrifices are ordered to the spirits of the mountains, waters, wind, clouds, thunder and rain—all things which, in the cosmogonic genesis, are regarded as consequential products of the activity of the heavens, and which it is forbidden to honour publicly.

‘Any person found in possession of a book on astrology shall be punished with 100 strokes of the cane.

“Diviners and masters of the science of the elements are forbidden to frequent the residences of mandarins to discuss the good or bad fortune of the State. They may use books only to predict the fate of individuals. Any violation shall be punished by 100 strokes of the cane” [4] .

The societies condemned by these texts are:

a) The *Thiendiânhiên* (literally: heaven, earth, man), the society of our ‘true Ancestor’ who was heaven, whose name, encompassing the three worlds, indicates its generalising, coordinating purpose, and, consequently, its practical pursuit of solidarity.

b) Le *Bachlienhue* (or *Hoasenchang*), ‘White Water Lily’, whose name indicates political and social tendencies, for those who understand the symbolic significance of the water lily.

Any Chinese person who feels the moral need may join the first of these societies. But they participate, of course, only in its benefits, without even having any idea of the duties and responsibilities incumbent upon the leaders.

Mere desire is not enough to enter the *Bachlienhue*; one must possess both knowledge and ability: knowledge of the interpretation of the characters, the outer and inner meanings of the Sacred Books, the depths of Taoist teaching, and the practice of certain rites and formulas; and the ability to act with complete independence, to retain one’s freedom of action, to reach the places and people that circumstances may dictate, and to break away, at

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[3] *Laws of the Kingdom*, Book VI; *Ritual Laws*, Part[1], Sections IV and VI.
[4] *Ibid.*, *Ritual Laws*, Part 2, Sections III and XV.

the desired moment, all social and even human ties. One need not be Chinese to join the 'White Water Lily', but it has no immediate purpose, at least outside China. This society may have members outside Asia, but it does not appoint official representatives there.

The signs of recognition are twofold: they include the signs of other associations—the claw and the double clasp—and then a sign very ingeniously borrowed from a foreign religion.

Despite the bans and prosecutions to which it is subjected, this society forms the most formidable organisation in China, and it has left its mark on all the major events of this century that have linked the West with the East. It is therefore here that I wish to demonstrate, by way of comparison, that a secret society, well-organised and truly secret, can and must succeed in determining the actions of citizens and even of the public authorities, which it undermines and which pursue it by outlawing its members: all this without fanfare and without money. Without dwelling on other reasons of a specific nature, it must be stated that an association will only achieve such a goal if it accepts its members only after a thorough preliminary examination, focusing on: 1° the knowledge acquired by the applicant following studies undertaken under the guidance of suitable tutors; 2° the applicant's personal character, the value that can be attributed to their energy, willpower, activity and their entire individuality, and the passions that their past may reveal; 3° the applicant's ability to understand and receive the teaching that still awaits them, and the more or less perfect didactic and practical manner in which they will be able to benefit from it. All those who do not fully satisfy this threefold examination must be excluded.

Finally, the objective will be achieved only if the members are bound to one another and to the association by the closest and most obscure ties, if silence and secrecy are strictly demanded and observed, and if the most complete obscurity surrounds the association's actions and the existence of its leaders. A secret society whose leader is known relinquishes all political and external pretensions, and is—from this point of view—nothing more than an intellectual gymnastics club or a gathering of lecturers. Apply the foregoing to the ancient Rosicrucians and the Francs-Juges on the one hand, and to modern Freemasonry on the other; one will see where the observance or neglect of these rules leads, and one will not be surprised at the precision of these requirements and the apparent severity of these assessments.

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The *Bachlienhue*, where all the enemies of foreigners gather – even those foreigners who are within the Empire – pursues the dream of Chinese hegemony, or rather of the freedom of the Chinese race (for Chinese philosophy excludes any supremacy of one race over another). From this society spring the domestic political movements whose aim is to restore China to itself; in the first third of this century, it was the cradle of that formidable Taiping uprising, which conquered Nanjing and southern China, and nearly transformed the Asian continent

. The Taiping Rebellion was drowned in blood and carnage; the tribes that had supported it perished in the massacres; and from those spared their lives, the imperial executioners tore out the canine teeth, so that the suspects might be publicly recognised. One need only look at the proclamations of the man who was elected emperor in Nanking, the statement of his demands in Peking, the hymns sung in his honour (of which I have a copy authenticated by his own seal), to recognise the political doctrines to which I referred a moment ago, and to have no doubt that, had the Taiping succeeded, China would not today be the great and solemn sleeper we know.

After the war, discontent persisted, and new waves of dissent arose. It was necessary to deploy them abroad so that they might not become a threat at home. The revolts in Yunnan had scarcely ended when the French invasion of Annam and Tonkin began. The Taiping regions were neighbours of these kingdoms; the Black and Yellow Banners, the Quantgthôs of the Canton viceroyalty, and what remained of the Man and the supporters of Lihung-choï united to repel, in the name of the principles of solidarity, the new invader. The Peking dynasty agreed with the associations in their efforts, and it was perhaps this that embarrassed and constrained it. But the war that France had to wage in Tonkin, from the capture of Hanoi by Rivière to the lifting of the blockade of Tuyenquang by Giovaninelli, was a struggle of secret influences. History proves this, albeit unwittingly.

There was not a single Chinese general in that war: the Viceroy of Canton did not leave his home; and the Viceroy of Yunnan took so long to muster his troops that peace had been signed in Tientsin before they had even appeared on the theatre of war. The Chinese regulars, who are never organised into standing armies, were enlisted surreptitiously and placed under the command of officers other than their usual commanders. The master of this war was Luu-vinhphuoc, leader of the Black Flags, to whom Peking sent, as a formality, the title of general, and who had, for several years, been *hoangiap* (the highest scholarly title, reserved for men distinguished by their power). Popular legends had attributed to him the horoscope of the star of Tranguyen, a seven-rayed star that appears at the birth of liberators and sages who have attained the highest degree of wisdom. From this attribution, one may deduce the role played by Luu-vinhphuoc and the rank he held within the associations. With the peace treaty signed with China, and Luu-vinhphuoc installed as second viceroy of Canton, the war against France continued, under the command of several members of the Hoang clan, an illustrious Taoist family, and lasted for several more years with the same vigour. Can one even say that it is now completely over, or merely dormant due to external circumstances?

Indeed, the Sino-Japanese War provided the societies with fresh impetus for action: this action was not what one might suppose. Whilst the wars in Tonkin were a struggle between peoples, the societies were well aware that it was towards Peking that the Japanese were directing their attacks: above all, they knew that Europe would never permit the dismemberment of China for the benefit

a new 'Yellow Power'. It was therefore merely a dynastic war, and perhaps an opportunity to rid themselves of the dynasty. And one might well believe that the Japanese – a people very warlike and well-prepared, but also very vain and ill-informed – would not have had such an easy time of it, had the secret societies not provided them, at every turn, with guides, provisions and victories. The generals of the Petchili were defeated; the Chinese army did not appear, and there is a significant part of the Empire – the region where Madrolle's Lyon mission spent an entire summer – which is not even aware that there was a war and an invasion in northern China. For the Chinese world, it was merely a local incident of far less significance than the Taiping Rebellion. Thanks to Europe, the Manchu dynasty remained on the throne, and not an inch of the empire's territory passed to the victors.

But there is one strange fact, for which no one has yet provided an explanation. Through an unforgivable oversight on the part of French diplomacy, the island of Formosa was abandoned to Japan. Has anyone asked why the Japanese, the immediate victors over a vast empire, were unable, after two years of continuous fighting and great sacrifices, to take control of an island with fewer than 5,000,000 inhabitants? It is because the mysterious aid they found on their march on Peking, and which they would have found right up to the foot of the throne, failed them here. To wrest Formosa from China is *to violate solidarity*. Add to this that Formosa is the refuge of the former Pavillons, and falls under the military jurisdiction of Luu-vinhphuoc, and one will understand why Formosa first declared itself a Republic, and then revolted in its entirety. This is why, just as Admiral Courbet once was isolated in the single port of Kelung, the Japanese are reduced to remaining at the gates of their new possession, unable to send in a single soldier or official, and why, despite the passage of time and the treaties, Formosa will remain the property, not of China, but of the Chinese.

As for the recent uprisings (1900), the attitude of the Chinese during the Russo-Japanese War, and the signs of a new xenophobic revolution which are today taking on a new and peculiar intensity, it is solemnly claimed that these stem from an unknown secret society, to which the British have given the name '*Boxers*'. As it is well known that those who educate young people retain a lasting influence over their former pupils, British correspondents have stated that these *Boxers* were led by their former masters—masters of fencing, cane-fighting, *boxing*, stick-fighting and gymnastics—and that, as a result, they were very strong, very agile, and could become dangerous; this was written in all seriousness, and the trouble was taken to resort to an etymology, which was, moreover, false.

This sect is correctly called *Kiaôtze*: a double Chinese ideogram whose exact meaning is 'Society of Universal Harmony' (harmony, in the sense of common accord or shared views). The word *Kiaô* is the generic term for all secret or private societies. From the very first day, a linguistic error was made, which I am surprised Mr Léon de Rosny, the learned professor at the School of Oriental Languages, did not immediately point out. The hooligans who fight with their fists and clutter the streets with their brawls are called: *Kiào*. The English failed to notice that the first *Kiaô* has a long accent on the o, whereas the second *Kiào* has a short accent on the a. The *members*

become fist-fighters, that is to say, *Boxers*. Everything else is pure invention: there are not, in all of China, fifty masters of gymnastics, boxing or fencing; and those few are classified as street performers, tasked with entertaining the crowds on feast days or market days, and would have no influence over their pupils if they had any pupils other than their own children. The current revolt is no special revolt; it is an episode in the perpetual struggle between the Yellow and the White, a struggle which this time has taken the railway concessions affair as its pretext, a struggle which will end only with the retreat of the White or the extermination of the Yellow.

These *Boxers*, these *Kiaôtze*, unknown yesterday, will be unknown tomorrow. They have only a momentary and relative existence, corresponding to the immediate goal set before them, and for which they were created.

Indeed, there are only two secret societies in the whole of China, one for the North, the other for the South; but it is customary for the members of a secret society, whether appointed voluntarily or not, to carry out some political action, to take a specific name, which begins and ends with that particular action, so that, in the event of failure, the parent society is not compromised. Thus the *Boxers* came into being with the start of the railway revolt and will perish with its end.

To ensure clarity for all, let us continue to refer to the rebels of the *Kiaôtze* sect by that erroneous and ridiculous name, *'Boxers*'. For the purposes of the present account, they hail from *Thiendiânhiên*.

This society, which includes courtiers, high-ranking mandarins, ministers and even members of the imperial family, is committed to preserving, alongside the ruling dynasty, the existing order of things as it stands today. This shows just how much the *Thiendiânhiên*, and the *Boxers*, its vanguard, act solely in accordance with the secret wishes of the Empress Dowager, protector of 'conservative' ideas and desirous of *the* current *status quo*. Moreover, one must be fully convinced that, if the *Boxers*, on the pretext of tearing up railway tracks, set the north of the empire and the capital ablaze, it was because they were secretly encouraged to do so by the complacent inaction of the Empress Dowager and Prince Tuan, honorary protector of *the Kiaôtze*.

The *Thiendiânhiên* saw the whole of northern China criss-crossed by railways; he feared for Chinese solidarity and hegemony; he saw foreigners, for the past four years, descending upon the coasts of China with the attitude of birds of prey; he feared for the throne and for the dynasty. And now the whole of northern China is in turmoil.

But it is the 'White Water Lily', *Bachlienhue*, who seeks to renew China, to set it once more on the path of progress, where, for so many centuries, it has stood still. It is the 'White Water Lily' who wants well-recruited, well-trained armies equipped with sophisticated weapons of war: the 'White Water Lily' would not rebel against the railways; he would use them for a national purpose. Anything goes for him to awaken China, to transform the *'gen'*, or instinct of the Chinese race, into that modern patriotism which hates the foreigner, and which rushes to the borders to 'make progress'. Thus the 'White Water Lily', composed of Chinese

irredentists, ardent souls, open-minded and intelligent minds, is the most formidable enemy of the Europeans.

During the first three weeks of the *Boxer* Rebellion, the 'White Water Lily' did not lift a finger: he believed the rebellion to be a sham, staged to consolidate the Empress's power and draw her into his ultra-conservative resistance. But when the 'White Water Lily' saw that the Chinese people were beginning to rise up against the foreigners, that the political movement was becoming revolutionary, and that this revolution might, just as easily as foreign intervention, sweep away the Manchu throne, the 'White Water Lily', in turn, rose up against both the foreigners and the dynasty, and set about reviving in practice the dream of the Taiping Emperor of Nanking.

The history of recent years is thus illuminated in the simplest and most definitive way. The entire Chinese empire, for various reasons, is hostile to the dominance and greed of foreigners; it would not be hostile to their presence – and this fact must be noted and always borne in mind – if these foreigners came individually, to live or trade, and if the whites did not always proceed by demarcating zones of penetration and administrative influence. One must admit that the conduct of the powers, especially since 1895, justifies all the Chinese mistrust on this subject. However, apart from this general animosity, a section of the empire will take advantage of the foreigners' incursions into the North to attempt to rid themselves of the Manchu dynasty, and will endeavour to emulate the foreigners in all industrial and military progress. This is the 'Reform Party', of which the 'White Water Lily' is the centre and mainstay.

Responding to Emperor Kangxi's desire for progress, the 'White Water Lily' sent him one of its leading propagandists, the famous Kang Youwei. Had Kang-yu-Wei carried out his reforms, had he been able to bring about the gradual evolution he envisioned for the Chinese army and nation, China might have endured for a few more years; but, once these improvements had been achieved, Kang-yu-Wei would have raised it up with a single gesture: the Manchu dynasty would have been overthrown, and a national dynasty would have presented to the astonished West a reformed, armed, powerful China, and, most likely, one that was numerically invincible.

The palace revolution that ousted Kang-yu-Wei and restored power to the Empress Dowager (who saw that the fall of the dynasty would be the crowning achievement of the reforms) handed the government over to a so-called conservative party, which harbours hatred for foreigners but is completely ignorant of their strength. And Prince Tuan, who had never set foot in Europe nor even glanced at a book of scientific propaganda, immediately quashed this popular revolution, the fervour of which Kang Youwei had intended to save for the day when the whole of China could have supported it with a modern army, modern equipment and modern education.

Today, therefore, for the sake of Chinese homogeneity, the 'Great Ancestor', the 'Nénufar' and its subsidiaries are competing with Europe, America and Japan itself. There is no doubt that this competition will continue to the perpetual benefit of the associations. What nobler goal could one propose to men? There is no need to look

elsewhere for a resounding conclusion: I find this one sufficiently eloquent, and I offer it as an example to all those who, having worked and learnt, wish to share the fruits of that labour and knowledge with their brothers scattered throughout the world. For the gifted man, there are no races, nor latitudes. The same principles, piously cultivated, can give rise to the same devotion, and bestow upon resolute men and their constant efforts the same formidable and hidden power, all the more formidable for being better concealed.

Power is the logical and natural path of energetic, learned and silent men.

CHAPTER VIII

The Sacred Sciences

The initiatory centres of Taoism and the various levels of secret ranks did not content themselves with scrupulously preserving the mysteries of Tradition, the principles of esotericism and the intrigues of politics. They also preserved, under the name of *Sacred Sciences*, the results of the Ancestors' experiments concerning dangerous subjects or esoteric subjects, arising directly from esoteric dogmas. These sciences are the subject of the text of *the Phankhoatu*, and a list of them has been given elsewhere.

Dangerous sciences include: toxicology, the science of perfumes, external forces, and evocation. – Secret sciences include: intermediate phenomena, human exteriorisation, the laws of the ages, powers, influences and forces, divination, and a happy death.

To this list, one must add a series of experimental sciences which, whilst not strictly *sacred*, nevertheless fall within the realm of Taoist teachings, and are known and practised, in their entirety and in detail, only by *Taoists* who have attained certain ranks. They are, in short, the material consequence of the secret teachings; and they are held in lower esteem than the teachings from which they derive, although they are of a more extraordinary, more unexpected and, to the common people, more admirable nature.

They operate on the planes of experimentalism, philosophy[1], the hieratic and the occult.

These sciences, which scholars still shield from their powerful inertia, are illuminated by glosses and acroamatic texts. Daughters of the special genius of the Far East, only their names are known in the West, and there is but a faint notion of the principles expounded therein, and of the theories that flow from them. They are no more common in Europe than are combinations of amorphous bromides, laws on personal property, or Joule's theories on electrical potential common in China. They encompass the entire cycle of human knowledge.

In *experimentalism*, it is *pathogenesis* which, refusing to see in external material harm the efficient cause of diseases, breaks down the human being into its normal elements, following pathological rules, and discovers the morbid ingressus,

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[1] We shall not discuss this here, having exhausted the subject in *The *Metaphysical Way**.

It personalises and isolates it even before it has acted, and thus presents it, without veils, to the blows of vigorous medication. This is *aetiology*, the immense scale of terrestrial nosology, reconstructed in its true degrees by patient builders, classifying diseases according to the absolute value of their causes, and not according to the variable severity of their manifestations. It is *deductive therapeutics* and *pharmacology*, applied in accordance with the logical consequences of pathogenic theorems, now unshakeable: it is *manigraphy* and *kinesitherapy*, the dual science of the aberrant follies of the soul and the body, founded on bases other than those we ascribe to them, leaving nothing to the vagaries of experimentation, and enabling action as infallible as that following syllogistic reasoning; it is *noogenics* accepted in all cases, *contrastimulation* and *metathesis*, practised in its wake with perfect diagnostic certainty.

In *philosophy*, it is the psychology of the seven normal elements of man, the elucidation of sensory and emotional phenomena, and the human problem pushed to the point of determining its divine unknown; it is traditional logic, and the demonstration of the futility of any theodicy; it is morality reduced to universal compassion.

In metaphysics, it is ideogeny, ontology, acrotism[2] .

In *hieratic* terms, it is *iconology*, the science of sacred diagrams, where, beyond and above the books, the understanding of the arcane lies dormant; it is contemplative *mathesiology*, where the self-taught disciple finally ascends the final rungs of knowledge himself; it is strict and profound *ritualism*; it is *siderism*, the rational science of the stars, whose movement carries us along, and whose mysterious attraction governs our destinies.

Finally, in *occultism*, these are the *metapsychological sciences*, raised from the empiricism in which they usually wallow, to the status of visible manifestations of a hidden influence—deductive rather than inductive, consequential rather than hypothetical: it is *megalanthropogenesis*, an art lost to our contemporaries, who procreate as they eat, drink and play cards, an art that transmutes a fleeting eroticism into a considered act, at which even fools no longer dare to smile. It is *suggestive obstetrics*; it is *divinatory genethliac*; it is *the hermeneutics* of hierograms and sigillary ideography. It is the whole of *pneumatology*, that strange science of the relationships between worlds and beings, psychic dimorphism, at the threshold of which Bernheim's myopia hesitates and Charcot's negation sneers. Finally, it is *thaumatology*, the art of performing *miracles* naturally and of being able, through mastery of oneself, to command nature and others, in accordance with the most secret laws, and by means of wandering forces, whose unknown dynamism sometimes submits to the will of the clairvoyant; it is this dark power that its custodians keep silent about, and of which the Empire is undoubtedly the last heir, the Empire that places upon the field of its coins, at the head of its banners and upon the pediment of its temples, the winged Dragon, the omniscient master of the paths to the right and to the left.

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[2] Cf. *The Metaphysical Way*.

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CHINESE PATHOGENESIS

The entire therapeutic tradition of the Far East stems directly from the dogmas of the most ancient scholarship. In Buddhist belief, in mystical Taoism, in the distant and metaphysical *I Ching*, there is but a single, irreducible assertion regarding the seven primary elements that constitute the human composite. Under different names, their nature remains identical, and the universality of this widespread belief has influenced all the secondary sciences that emerged in later eras, within minds shaped by this first and unbreakable principle.

In a close union, which is a pledge of truth, hieratic science, popular faith and physiological findings corroborate one another, support one another and assist one another on different levels.

The people of the Far East have excellently recognised that the science of bodily preservation could only find its way by being illuminated by the torch lit by the intellectual sciences, and that the primary duty of an experimental science was to take, as an axiomatic principle, the logical deduction of the rational sciences.

It is only the presumptuous who would seek to determine the truths of the spiritual plane through the sensibilities of the psychic plane, and these through the empiricism of the physical plane. Such a bizarre opinion obviously stems from a poorly coordinated acquisition of concepts, from an incoherent jumble of principles in a mind that bursts at the seams trying to contain them all, from a false impression in the brain of probable experimental data, to which vanity—common to the imperfect—freely lends the power of evidence or rational proof.

Pure and primary science must give rise to the various bodies of knowledge that man subsequently discovers, by applying eternal principles to the different degrees and diverse situations of bodies.

But, just as a corollary cannot claim to govern the theorem, so the secondary sciences cannot claim anything regarding or against the primary sciences; and, if physiology or therapeutics suddenly seem to rebel against metaphysics or psychology, there must be no doubt for a moment that the experimental work was flawed, and that empiricism must be started afresh.

Such is the foundation of the observational sciences of the Far East; one need look no further for the cause of the extraordinary physical prowess of its scholars and the marvellous insight of their experiments.

In pathology, they applied their doctrines with the utmost precision and interpreted them with the greatest insight. Aware that diseases, as they appear to us, are mere effects, and that the causes of these diseases in specific organs are merely immediate consequences of the true cause, they sought the origin of all illness at a higher level, in one of the essential principles of man, so that, once the pathological source had been discovered, they might dry it up in a single

blow with the appropriate remedy, no longer directed at the tangible consequence, but at the primordial cause, often obscure, always hidden.

And in this regard, they established the principles of a truly original science – whose name, unique in the West, no longer makes much sense to our ears – pathogenesis, which is, in the strict sense of the word, nosological acrotism.

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In empiricism, say the Chinese, simplifications are more often mixtures than reductions and thus lead only to confusion. Here, then, is their theory:

The body (*Xuong*, organic substances) and the blood (*Maû*, vehicle of animal life) constitute the lower elements of man. The *Wun,* or heavenly will, which holds the human composite together in its integrity (recall Paracelsus), the divine fragment within us, and the intellect (*Tinh*), which is not the faculty of reason but the faculty of associating ideas, constitute the higher elements. Such are the *body* and *mind* whose union makes up the human being. Yet blood, however pure and globular it may be, cannot serve to sustain physical existence unless it is at once agile, warm and vibrant; the association of ideas cannot manifest itself in our speech without an intimate connection with the body: there must therefore necessarily exist within us a faculty of warmth, movement and light, which lies beyond all physiology and beneath all understanding. This faculty has three distinct modes of manifestation and operation; and it is advisable to allow it its triple determination, if one is not to err – in this invisible and, consequently, difficult realm – at the moment of specialisation.

Now, the *higher* elements, arising from the One Will and its consequences, cannot be *essentially* affected by any evil.

However, the *lower* elements can only be directly attacked by *external* influences, whether destructive or deleterious; that is to say, their sole afflictions can only manifest as a loss of quantity or a change in quality. The only two *essential* diseases of the lower elements are therefore corruption and anaemia, two visible diseases, the prognosis, treatment and cure of which do not go beyond the usual empirical approach.

Thus, all diseases, whether they affect any of the human elements (except the seventh, which is unassailable and can cause only a single state—sudden death, which is not a disease, due to its dissociation from the other elements), all diseases have their primary cause in one of the three intermediaries that link bodily molecules to the faculties of the mind (which could not interact in their coexistence without the aid of means from another plane). Movement, breath and light are therefore, precisely because of their essential subtlety, the first elements to be exposed to pathogenic influences, the gateways through which evil enters the composite being that we are.

Eastern pathogenesis therefore consists, following a psychological diagnosis, in determining, amongst these gateways, which one has been opened or broken, so that the therapeutic approach may directly close or rebuild it.

Once these considerations are accepted as direct consequences of psychology and metaphysics, what conclusion follows?

It means, in the case of a disease detected early in a body not afflicted by physiological distress, to disregard the visible effect—however terrifying it may seem—in order to trace the essential cause, hidden and obscure though it may be, but the sole effective cause of the ailment, and to attack it exclusively. It is the absolute rejection of all experimental empiricism, of all external medication, of all topical remedies; in practical terms, it is the exclusion of all substitutes, and the reduction of the pharmacopoeia to a few regenerative and revulsive principles, applied appropriately to the discovery of the determining causes of the illness. It is the classification of nosology into a few specialised headings.

Above all, it is the psychological and intellectual struggle against the evil that coincides with and is intimately linked to the material struggle against the consequent disease; it is, following the precise determination of the pathogenic ingress into the specialised human element, the toning, the stimulation, the awakening, or, as the case may be, the slowing down, the cooling, the depletion of said element, and in any case its return to its customary influence within the human organism. It is the rigorous treatment, on both the mental and physical planes, of the true cause; it is the reduction of the harm produced in the fundamental element, the suppression of the disorder manifested in the physical location of that element, irrespective of the process followed in the various organs by the development of the disease.

This means that, based on the indications of a careful pathogenesis, therapy is nothing more than a material corollary of a science of psychic observation; that this corollary, whilst losing all its experimental scope, simultaneously loses its random chances and its susceptibility to error; and that, freed from all the fallacies entailed by poorly made observations, or by the recording of extraneous symptoms due to external circumstances unknown to the observer, medicine is nothing more than a logical application of a physiological psychology of considerable value, and gains in precision what it seems to lose in initiative.

It is nevertheless worth adding that treatment by direct remedy, to the exclusion of substitutes, involves the use of the most powerful revulsives and toxins, capable of revolutionising the human organism; that this treatment entails the use, without any emollient or tempering, of specific quantities over specific periods; it must be added that the potency of this medication requires, in all the other elements of the human constitution, a vital force and sufficient energy to withstand its action and produce reflex effects that will benefit the affected and treated element. The patient must therefore possess strength and youth, and furthermore general good health, which presupposes that the ailment has been treated as soon as it was recognised, and that the diathesis, in cases of heredity, has been addressed from the earliest age. We shall therefore conclude immediately that, whilst sudden accidents, serious ailments, and even desperate cases encounter, in the application of pathogenetics to therapeutics,

truly extraordinary chances of recovery, unknown to Westerners; on the contrary, chronic patients, the elderly, those suffering from anaemia, and those with a diathesis of untreated ancestry are unlikely to recover, because therapeutics does not admit or ignores the substitutes capable of alleviation and relief, and because the patients would not tolerate the violent medications alone capable of curbing the illness.

That a localisation of the vital elements therefore seems necessary is beyond doubt; but this localisation – which is purely theoretical – serves, as a starting point in pathogenesis, only in the same way that the assumption of a value for *x* serves in the discussion of an algebraic equation; taken on its own, the assumption is gratuitous and open to challenge; but it is a necessary hypothetical basis, from which reasoning proceeds to follow the chain of possible positions, assign them corresponding values, and then return to *the* initial, indeterminate *x*, for which the definition of all neighbouring values leaves only a single place to be taken, which is its true place. Thus has it been reasoned in the arrangement of vital elements throughout the organs, and one must even admit a normal reversal of the original hypothesis in certain psychological, physiological, or even pathological cases, foreseen in advance: just as, upon the imperceptible passage of a value across a designated dividing line in the *curve of values*, the corresponding value of the unknown suddenly leaps from *plus infinity* to *minus infinity*.

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The *Khi,* or breath (see the Stoic doctrine), the vehicle of life in general, is the factor that appears to be the most important in this organisation, or, at any rate, the one whose quantitative value appears to be the most significant.

Since the three soluble elements possess the potential for vital animation, and the three immortal elements possess the potential for temporary localisation, the *Khi*, by virtue of its complexity, links together and unites elements of diverse essences and disparate properties. Indeed, the *Khi* shares this in common with the dissoluble elements that it dies, and this in common with the immortal elements that it does not dissolve, and that it unites, through an immediate resurrection, with these immortal elements, to constitute a new mode of existence. Such is the mechanism of birth; such is, by inversion, the mechanism of death.

The *Khi* (breath of life), whose entry into play directly causes life in the human organism, gives rise to two movements to be determined, one in the higher realms, one in the lower; these two movements apply to two spheres, one physical and material, the other hyperphysical and intellectual; these essences, these elements, these movements, constitute the workings of the organism, which is called normal human existence.

On the physical side, the *Khi*, proceeding directly to the lungs—organs of combustion and the regeneration of fuels—reaches the blood, which moves and, under its impulse, forms the (lower) blood node, schematised in the form of a whirlpool or a plexus.

On the psychic side, the *Chi* encounters the immortal element *Thân* (light and consequently heat). It immediately unites with it in the most indissoluble manner (this is natural, since the *Khi*, subject to resurrections, is more drawn to the side of the immortals than to the side of the dissoluble) and forms with it the psychic nodus, which spreads throughout the whole being, but has its special location in the heart: the *Thân*, when it is alone, is not localised. But it should be noted that the isolation of *the Thân* is a potentiality, not a state.

When united, the *Thân* and the *Khi* become *the* single *Thânkhi* (astral fluid or body): it spreads around the immortal elements; it affects the *Tinh* (association of ideas) and produces there the intellectual nodus, a temporary location in the brain. I say 'temporary' because it is accepted in the East that it is not necessary to have a brain to have associations of ideas.

Since it is pointless – and even dangerous, says the *Phankhoatu* – to seek to influence the *Wun* (which is merely a manifestation) and link it to human elements, all that remains is to explain the action of movement on the tangible organs that form the human 'body'.

Here, however, there is a special application of the principle of *Am-duong*[3] (a dual principle, physiologically hot and cold, dry and moist). A superficial experiment establishes that the human body, through its release of both heat and humours, participates in this dual principle.

Every secretion, every release, implies an internal movement; hence the kidney is regarded as a centre of movement, since it secretes bodily fluids; consequently, it serves, in the functioning of the lower elements, as a sort of intermediary. Its very name attests to this (*Thânthuy*: wet kidney). It corresponds to *the Am* of the dual principle.

On the other hand, heat must also have its own specific movement; and this movement must have a seat. The *Thân* (heat) moves with *the Khi* and cannot begin its movement without it; however, it has its own movement: therefore, by the analogy dear to Easterners, and to satisfy the *Duong* of the dual principle, there exists, situated opposite the *Thânthuy*, a *Thânhoa* (movement of heat), which binds the *Thân* to the fate of *the Khi*.

Thus, the normal entry of *Khi*; its immediate division, a quantity proportional to *Thân* attaching itself to this *Thân* to form the psychic nodus; and this psychic nodus activating the intellectual (location: the heart, the brain); the remainder of *Khi* activating the blood, and forming the bodily nodus (location: the lungs), the *Am-duong* principle connecting the lower regions via *Am* through a reactive movement (location: the kidney) and pushing, via *Duong*, the *Thân* towards its normal path (location undefined: by analogy, *Am* is placed in the left kidney and *Duong* in the right kidney; but there are no other reasons for this than the entirely arbitrary reasoning of

[3] *The Am-duong*, a dual, creative principle of Fohi's metaphysics, is the foundation of Chinese metaphysical philosophy. Its applications are found in all branches of all sciences, and this theory is posited as an axiomatic and quasi-divine principle.

the love of symmetry): such is the form of vital action upon the human organism in a normal and healthy state. Let us recall once more that physiological localisation has a hypothetical, and merely plausible, starting point in the specialisations of various pathological cases, the course of which may rationally alter the ordinary course of events and reduce it to the mere value of a circular argument.

We can see from this what physiological experience such a science demands of the therapist in practice, and how much a true scholar of the experimental sciences, in order to diagnose with certainty, must be a philosopher, even more so than a doctor.

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Let us now outline the pattern of normal life, as suggested by the preceding discussion: we shall recognise, in the arrangement of the seven elements, their respective relationships within the human constitution, and their parallel and opposing tendencies; we shall note the close union of *Thân* and *Khi*, the indication of influences, and the significance of the three nodus for health. Finally, we shall note (and this is sometimes cited as proof that Chinese doctrines are not pantheistic) the isolation of the supreme element, whose presence binds the six elements together, yet which is linked to none of them except by its own will; and, at the other end of the compound, one will also note the concordant position of the final element, which is affected by the compound but not connected to it—a singular fact from which, in Eastern psychology, the most daring theories are derived, one of them being this: that man does not need, in order to live, the human form we call the body.

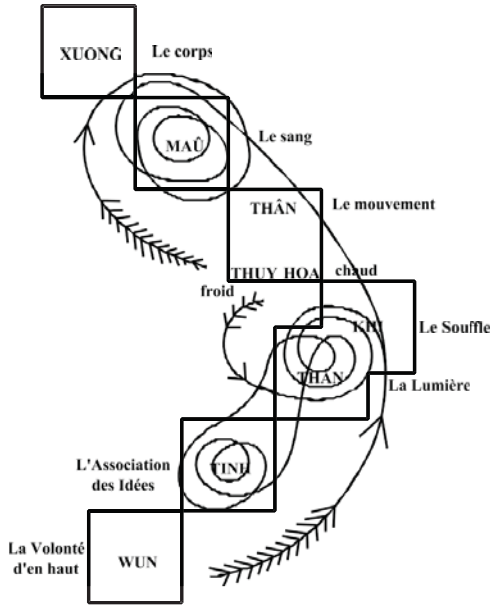

Fig. 1 – Life.

This diagram is the graphic origin of the entire representation of pathogenesis. For, when examining the prognosis of a disease, the therapist will refer to this diagram and, applying the experimental observation of a particular ailment (deficiency or excess in the body's systems), will first deduce the affected nodus, then the motor, or the caloric or the luminous, impeded, diminished, or increased, then the original morbid entry, and finally the element of the human composite that is specifically under attack. And from this lengthy psychological examination flows his diagnosis alone, which will often differ from the one he would have given upon a mere superficial examination of the prognoses.

All normal states of human life can thus be reduced to patterns, almost always consistent with empirical data. The rule for establishing them is analogous to that by which pathological patterns are established. Starting from the pattern of life, one observes, by means of the symptoms, the characteristic of the new normal state through which the human organism passes. One observes the element specifically affected by the change of state, that whose functions become altered, through slowing down, diminution or increase. Logic leads, by analogy, to the sensation experienced by the element and by the corresponding motors; a strict deduction leads to the immediate consequence within the general organism. And, if the consequence is correctly deduced, the diagram must translate it, without any restriction, into a graph—not symbolic, but directly descriptive.

Let us therefore establish, on the same lines of reasoning, the diagrams of the two normal states of the healthy human being, apart from the state of ordinary life: the state of sleep and the state of death.

In the state of natural sleep (recall here the influence of the will on the various kinds of sleep), the slowing of blood circulation, and the independence restored to the association of ideas—and even to the simple idea—are the two characteristic symptoms, physical and intellectual. The diagram immediately illustrates these two differences.

The consequences are immediately apparent, and graphically so. The *Khi* located in the lungs (this portion is called *Khiphoî*) being less significant—the proof of which is that the blood, to which it corresponds, undergoes a slowed movement—it follows that the quantity of *Khi* applied to *the Thân* (located in the heart) is increased accordingly; and the union, called *Thânkhi*, is not closer, but more active and more subtle.

On the other hand, the normal intellectual function of *Thânkhi* (the activation of the *Tinh* element within the human body) ceases, since the independence of *Tinh* is one of the two symptoms of sleep. Thus, *Thânkhi*, having no further functions, *leaves its location*. The diagram immediately illustrates this (for an element can only be localised for an immediate purpose; once the purpose ceases, the cause of the localisation ceases, and the *subtle* element, resuming its nature of ubiquity, loses its localisation).

The *Thânkhi* thus leaves the sleeping person; and, as it is not bound to *the Tinh*, it no longer possesses free will, does not go where it pleases, and is independent of the sleeper: it is subject to the influences of time, place and space.

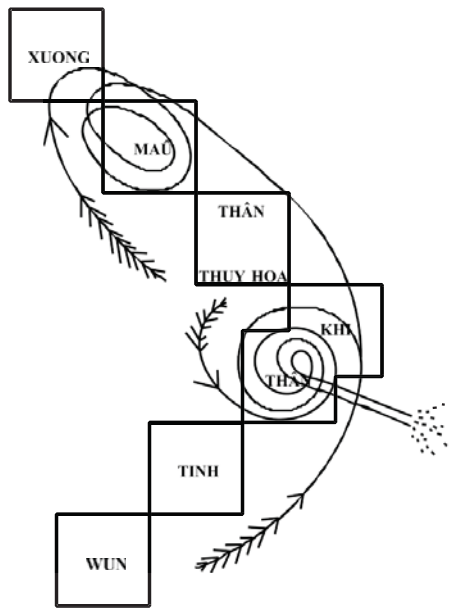

Fig. 2 – Sleep.

This diagram explains all dreams, and even those kinds of hallucinations attributed to the recollection of something seen, to a vague memory

of the past, a preoccupation with the possible, or a foreknowledge (in the literal etymological sense of the term) of the future.

This separation from *the Thânkhi* explains the danger posed by a sudden awakening, which violently reminds the sleeper of the distant *Thânkhi*, sometimes preoccupied elsewhere, to such an extent that its violent return can cause an inner catastrophe. This physiological fact has, moreover, been known for a long time, ever since the good Montaigne himself, who recommended that adolescents be awakened to the sound of very soft music. The explanation for the potential disturbance is entirely physical: sudden awakening causes the lower elements and the *Khiphoî* to be taken by surprise by the physical awakening preceding the intellectual awakening (and one can appreciate this fact by observing that, upon waking, one experiences a sensation before being capable of a feeling, and, *a fortiori*, of reasoning: for example, one feels the prick of a pin before realising that it is a pin that is pricking, and that it is a person holding the pin). Now, physical awakening, if the *Thânkhi* has not returned, calls for the *Thânkhi*; and, consequently, the moment—very imperceptible—that separates physical awakening from total awakening is a moment of general imbalance, arising from a lack of the intellectual.

Now, any violent surprise (such as that of a sudden awakening) causes an equally violent diastole and systole, corresponding to a temporary constriction or congestion of the arteries in the immediate vicinity of the heart. This phenomenon occurs precisely at the moment when the *Thânkhi*, abruptly recalled, seeks to return to its physiological location. It is therefore halted in its normal course by a physical obstacle.

However, the failure of *the Thânkhi* to return to the human body would constitute death; since this is not intended, and since *Wun* is always present in this existence—a presence that is binding—*the Thânkhi* is compelled either to force its way into its normal location or to find another; in the latter case, as *Thânkhi* is formed of an *immortal*, it goes to the location immediately above its own, the brain, the location of *Tinh*. The brain is therefore subjected to unusual heat and movement (prodromal symptoms of meningitis and pernicious fevers). Such are the delirium, migraines, nervous breakdowns, despair and uncontrollable tears, etc., of people who are startled awake.

The doctrine of *the Tinhdzuoc* goes even further: it asserts that the *Thânkhi* is endowed with special powers of perception; otherwise, it says, one might imagine a constant will or chance powerful enough to force the *Thânkhi* of two sleeping men to change, by reintegrating the opposing bodies, the human personalities of the sleepers; it admits that, in the *Thânkhi's* return upon waking, it cannot mistake itself, and psychically recognises the composite of which it forms a part.

Taking this to its logical conclusion, the *Tinhdzuoc* regard as harmful any change made to a body during sleep by an external cause, such as, for example, a change of clothes or the application of face paint: in particular, they state that painting the face of a sleeping yellow or white person black, should they be abruptly awakened, inevitably leads to delirium and temporary insanity. I have known *Thay-Thuoc* (doctors) who claim to have witnessed something similar. In any case, the artificial alteration of a man's complexion whilst he sleeps is a

a crime defined in the commentary on the Traditional Laws (but not in the Ritual Laws) and punishable by first-class exile.

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The pattern of lethargies (a state of trance, catalepsy or deep hypnosis, as these different states are brought about by external influences whose action overlaps in an identical pattern) clearly indicates that lethargy is a *deepened form of sleep*. Indeed, the symptom of slowed circulation extends to a complete standstill in lethargic individuals. The symptom of the intellect's independence extends to the intellect being taken over by a foreign will, whether friendly or hostile (as hypnoses demonstrate practically every day). The diagram illustrates these symptoms and draws the logical conclusions from them.

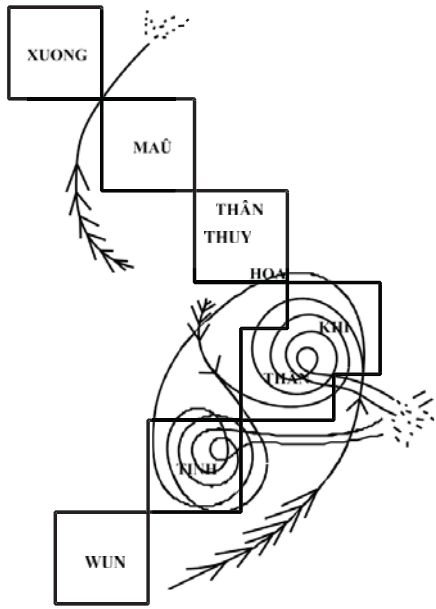

Fig. 3 – Lethargy.

As the influence of *Thânthuy* on the blood is halted, the localisation of a portion of *the Khi* in the lungs (*Khiphoî*) no longer serves any practical purpose or has any reason to exist; therefore, it disappears. All the *Khi* is thus sympathetically transferred to the *Thân* (indeed, the lethargic individual is insensitive, and even goes so far as to present all the appearances of death). On the other hand, the *Thân* is excessively stimulated by the entire *Khi*, which affects it with greater force and intensity than normal. There is therefore an increase in movement and heat; and the *Thânkhi* forms, instead of one, two plexuses; moreover, the analogous reflex effect dictates that the disappearance of the blood node is reflected in the appearance of a new node, in the superior elements that are graphically opposite.

The first nodus A, similar to that in the sleep diagram, swirls upon itself, and, having no further reason to localise, manifests externally under the same conditions as during sleep. Nodus B, of equivalent value, in terms of quantity of motion, to the normal value of *Khiphoî*, proceeds to *Tinh*, in accordance with its normal function, affects it, and stimulates it to perform its function. But *Tinh* cannot manifest itself physically, since it can act upon the lower elements only through the intermediary of nodus A, which is externalised. The location of nodus B in *Tinh* is therefore unnecessary; consequently, this nodus too becomes externalised, *taking with it the faculty of conceiving and associating the ideas* with which it has been imbued. From then on, the presence of *Wun* remains the sole reason for existence, which no longer manifests itself; for as long as this state lasts, human life is not threatened.

It should be noted, however, that from the moment the nodus B carried *Tinh* away on its outward journey, the psychic and intellectual split was complete, and under the worst possible conditions for the human being. Indeed, *Tinh* could no longer make use of the lower elements; yet his presence above these elements prevented any external will or force from utilising them; now the abandoned bodies (*Xuong* and *Maû*) are at the mercy of a clairvoyant will, and even of a natural force passing by by chance. One might see the truth of this thoroughly Eastern assertion on the day when reasoned experiments involving electricity or some measured form of dynamism were carried out on individuals in a deep state of lethargy.

Such is the explanation for the fact now established—and for which the stake was not out of place in days gone by—that the hypnotist's will penetrates the elements of the hypnotised person, holds them under his dominion and, as it were, at his service. But herein lies the responsibility of the experimenters, who are often endowed with more curiosity than willpower, and who, still ignorant of many things, neither foresee nor sense the approach of external forces equal to or greater than their own will, drawn by the abnormal phenomenon produced, and seizing, by virtue of their strength, one or more of the abandoned human elements.

As for the *Thânkhi* and *the Tinh*, they are subject only to a will strong enough to regulate their capricious flight. They can therefore be fairly easily seized by the operator, who provokes their emergence and is consequently forewarned of their passage; he can thus impose his will upon them. Thanks to the tenuousness and subtlety of these immortal elements, he can send them far away or recall them: he can make use of their special qualities to learn through them what he could not know by himself, for example to perceive what already exists, but which, because of the coarseness of our senses and the imperfection of our notions of time and space, we say must exist only in the future. The operator is thus master of the subject's body and mind (he is not master of the human composite nor of its life, for he cannot directly cause the subject's death, *at least in the specific case at hand*). And here, his responsibility is far greater than in the mere possession of the body. Indeed; before sending the subject's higher elements to any place or time, the experimenter ought to know in advance all the wandering vital forces that will oppose the journey these elements undertake at his command. For a force greater than that of the mover may halt the elements in their course; and, as these are never masters of their own conduct, they break

against this unforeseen barrier. On another plane, these elements may – given, above all, the realm in which they are usually sent to explore – encounter a will that is wise or free from our imperfect forms, which, being far superior to the operator's will, takes hold of these travelling elements itself (this occurs in countries where hypnotism is in vogue, and will certainly happen sooner or later in the West, once the practices, which have been experimented with rather lightly in recent years, have become widespread), applies them to specific purposes, and, ignoring or disdaining their origin, returns them, after having used them, to the realm of chance, disoriented, blinded, as incapable of finding the compound from which they emerged as the original operator is incapable of bringing them back under his control. There is no need to list the disasters that may result from such an eventuality.

In these lethargic conditions, an unexpected or careless awakening is fatal. This is a universally recognised fact, and I need not remind you of the accidents that occur when pranksters or the ignorant startle simple sleepwalkers awake.

This diagram offers little more than a single case for examination, a case which lifts a corner of the veil on one of the most serious and obscure problems: it is the case of the scholar who has acquired sufficient willpower, knowledge and self-control to be able, after placing himself in a lethargic state, to consciously develop within himself a sufficient measure of personality to take possession of his higher elements independently of the lower ones, and thus to be able, by his own efforts, transcend the limits of imperfect nature and find himself in a higher psychic state. Despite the research carried out to date, such a proposition would immediately be dismissed by Westerners as an unworkable hypothesis; yet this hypothesis belongs to the realm of truths and realities: the phenomenon occurs in the East, not frequently, but often enough not to be dismissed as a miracle.

Moreover, and without attempting to establish anything here, I am merely employing a didactic technique, attempting to demonstrate the deductive logic of certain facts that seem extraordinary, and which it would, on the contrary, be extraordinary to see occur in a different manner or not occur at all. A case such as the one I have just cited is a possibility; there are no barriers standing in its way. Under such conditions, which are obviously difficult to achieve, the diagram shows that the danger to the operator performing the operation on himself is very rare, but that, when it does arise, it is inevitable and fatal.

Indeed, the externalised force of the human elements is sufficient for the purpose intended, for the human will knows from the outset the psychic instrument it is to use, and avoids asking it to perform tasks that are useless or dangerous (because they are relatively unattainable). One source of danger is thus averted. But if the elements happen to be met by a superior will, either they are captured (and with them the will of the sleeper), or the watchful human will perceives the danger and, to escape it, rushes swiftly, along with the travelling elements, towards its physical location. And the violent return of the elements, the brutal contact of the higher with the lower through an agitated and unbalanced *Chi*, is likely to cause even more disasters than the violent return to normal life of natural sleepers, somnambulists and cataleptics.

I shall add no further comments here. I wish only to show that the pathogenic patterns of the human septenary, patterns which have existed for nearly five thousand years, contain, as regards the intermediate facts, the seed and the inevitable consequences of modern discoveries, and that, by pressing them, a writer possessing sufficient knowledge and time would draw from them propositions and corollaries as yet unsuspected.

The last normal schema of any interest is that of death. By death I mean here (as the Chinese masters do) normal death through wear and tear, without mental illness or decomposition; that is to say, that, a moment before the final disintegration of the human composite, all the elements of this composite body possess their relative value, their movement, and their rational action. Under these conditions, the model of death established in the Far East will lead us to some remarkable observations, which will delight modern psychists. The onset of agony robs the body of some of its sensitivity and the mind of some of its lucidity. Added to these symptoms are a slowing down of all functions and a general cooling of the organs. Movement, heat and light diminish proportionally until they disappear, which is death (the dissociation of the elements through the disappearance of *the Chi*).

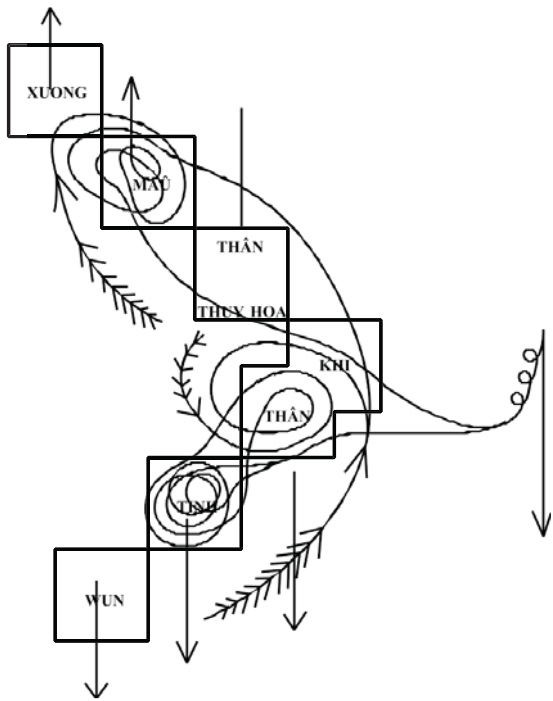

Fig. 4 – Death.

The various stages of this dissociation are shown in the diagram with remarkable clarity; it allows us to see both which elements are affected first, and also how long apparent death can last without leading to true death,

and finally how, as long as the essential element of coordination has not disappeared, it is possible to revive a compound which, though affected on all sides, has not yet undergone total dissociation.

The *Xuong* element is on the verge of dissolving, due to the tendency of the *Am* movement—which has emerged from *the Thânthuy*—to approach zero; the *Maû* element is nearing a state of stillness and cooling, due to the tendency of the particularised *Khiphoî*, which animates the *Maû*, to return to *the* central *Khi*. The *Thân* element *(Thânthuy* or *Thânhoa*) is directly affected by wear and tear, and is constantly approaching immobility (which is its individual death, since its raison d'être is movement). *Khi*, as *Khiphoî*, tends to lose its localisation, for as the *Khi* of *Thân* gradually diminishes, the *Khi* of *Phoî* tends to replace it, to prevent a break in continuity between the lower and upper elements. The *Thânkhi*, becoming increasingly weaker in both strength and quantity (still in the normal case of death by attrition), since it no longer finds within the human composite the driving forces or motives to which it can apply its activity, gradually withdraws. The *Thân* element, which is no longer stimulated by the *Hoa* movement and no longer has sufficient *Khi* to remain attached to it, tends towards dissociation and a return to the immortals. The *Tinh* element is no longer stimulated by the *Thân*, which devotes what little strength it has left solely to its own vitality, without any outward display, and tends towards dissociation as a result of its uselessness. The *Wun* element, whilst remaining present, gradually recedes; and one foresees the moment when, by dint of receding, it will no longer be visible, and when, subsequently, the human composite, lacking divine manifestation, will disappear.

This is the stage of diminished, yet still normal, life—the stage closest to death. The successive phenomena that bring it about can be broken down and summarised as follows: As the *Thânkhi* gradually diminishes, the material attraction and instinctive repulsion of every element towards dissociation force the *Khiphoî* to return to its physiological location to find the *Thânkhi*, which has become powerless; and this is the first symptom of death. The *Khi* disappears from all the visible elements of the composite; the pulse drops, circulation ceases, the blood withdraws and cools; immobility, insensitivity and pallor take hold in the lower elements: such is *animal death*. It is not essentially distinct from the deepest lethargy, but differs only in form; this is recognised today, even in the West, where total lethargy is frequently mistaken for death, and where people are sometimes buried who are not dead, and who only truly die because they have been buried. It is certainly prescribed to wait forty-eight hours between the onset of death and burial; but there are forms of lethargy – animal deaths – which last for several weeks and several months without leading to true death; it is also recommended that the extremities be burned; but it is not certain that the burning itself revives the lethargy; or, if it does, is it not, perhaps, so abruptly that the patient returns to life only to die immediately? It is absolutely certain that a certain number of individuals who are not dead are buried; it is certain that – if the custom of total cremation persists – several patients will be burned alive (albeit less frequently than in the case of burial). But it is even more certain that doctors will abandon certain patients as dead, when

appropriate care, and especially care administered at a precise moment, could prevent from dying; it is certain that – convinced of death in their own minds – they do absolutely nothing to arrive at a certain diagnosis of total death, and to shed light, on this crucial point, on their science, which remains shrouded in darkness.

The death of the animal is immediately followed by the cessation of all movement (for the *Thân* element is the first of the lower elements to be affected, standing at the pinnacle of them all). The death of *Thân* directly affects *Tinh*, which in turn is deprived of the force that enables it to unite with the movement of *Khi* and thus enliven the intellect. *Thân* (and consequently *Thânkhi*, since *Khi* and *Thân* are inextricably linked until the very last moment) therefore remains within itself, and its influence no longer affects the neighbouring elements; the *Tinh* element thus disappears from the system, and, whilst still subsisting (since *Wun* itself has not yet withdrawn), no longer takes its share of the human compound, though remaining virtually capable of being recalled; it has suffered no harm; only its link with the human compound has vanished. Such is the second moment.

The third moment is the most fleeting; it is the moment when *Khi* (despite the opposition of *the Khiphoî*) is too worn out, too weak to preserve, within the compound now so shaken, the immortal *Thân*, which is not subject to any essential diminution, but which needs, in order to remain within man, a force appropriate to its own that will hold it there. Disoriented, *Thân* therefore escapes slowly and as if with regret, and ascends into the higher realms. This is the death of the soul.

The disappearance of *the Thân* causes the human composite to die, but only indirectly, since, even then, *Wun,* 'though at the very edge of sight, has not yet completely disappeared'. With *the Thân* no longer in the composite, the localisation of *Khi* becomes unnecessary; *Khi* therefore abandons the lower elements. But
'He lingers for a moment above the body he has just left, as if he were reluctant to depart.' Indeed, he fades away little by little, and there is no reason for him to vanish abruptly; he departs gently, like the flame of a lamp running out of oil. This is why the rites symbolically instruct the son of the deceased father to go onto the roof of the house to call the spirit of the dead man who has not yet departed. This is why the *Tinhdzuoc*, and especially the *Phanac*, declare that the scholar who has observed all the phenomena of illness and death, and who finds himself, at the right moment, near the body, having observed the successive stages of death, can, with appropriate treatment, and within the brief span of time that concerns us, bring about an anagenesis that is still possible, and restore the whole of life to the human body, over which the *Khi* alone, the agent of total existence, still watches.

But this moment is extremely fleeting. Swiftly the *Chi*, abandoned, diminishes until it loses its very being; it tends towards its nature, towards the departed *Thân*; imperceptibly, it vanishes, it escapes, it dies, at that very moment when *Wun* disappears. Death is consummated.

But no sooner is he dead, to satisfy the law of the lower elements, than he is resurrected and soars towards the higher elements, in whose nature he shares, and reunites with *the Thân*, in order to resume a new existence, and to reconstitute, with other elements but with the same personality, the wave of immortal life.

Such is the Eastern conception of death. It is difficult not to be filled with admiration at such ideas; it is especially difficult not to recall, in the face of this doctrine, which is nearly five thousand years old, the dogma of *the* indissoluble *glorious* human *body* preached by the Apostle Saint Paul, with which and through which he declares that all men, whether rejoicing or suffering, live and will live eternally. (Saint Paul: *Romans*, VI, 5; VIII, 37, 38, 39. – *Cor.* :1st Epistle, VI, 13, 14; XV, 19, 20, 21, 22, 42, 43, 44, 52, 53, 54. – *Cor.* :2nd Epistle, V, 4.) Under
different terms, the belief is the same, and gives the disciples of Fohi and Lao Tzu, as well as the true followers of Christ, confidence in the reward—whether through other existences or a single one—for the labours of the present existence, and the comforting assurance that they will never lose that mysterious personality whom we love all the more because its mystery has caused us to hesitate, labour and suffer all the more.

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It is this method of schematisation that should be applied to the diagnosis of accidental diseases and protopathies, and above all to the deductive determination of the direct remedies required to treat them, through the immediate treatment of the element whose temporary abnormality is the cause of the ailment. This means that, after having – through symptomatology – precisely determined the nature and extent of the pathological 'ingressus', psychological reasoning must lead to the seat of the ailment. From then on, everything else—which constitutes the therapy proper—will be carried out by an operation analogous to that performed by the scholar who, having found an exact trigonometric formula, applies it to a specific solution using a logarithmic table.

To avoid tedious repetition, we shall set out here only the pathogenetic reasoning established for two diseases, both specific to the Far East, and whose prognoses are so similar that one is often uncertain during the first two or three days of the onset; these are cholera and pernicious fevers.

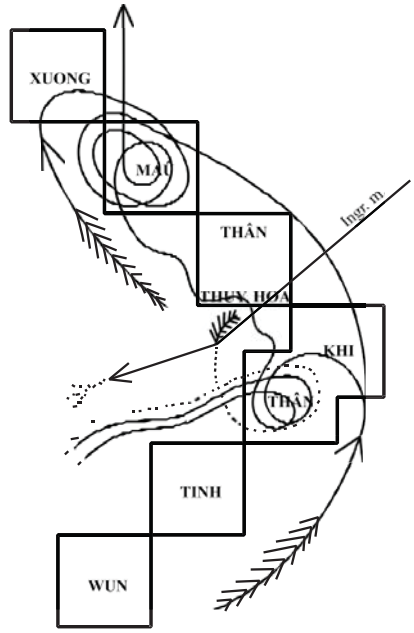

Fig. 5 – Cholera.

The first symptom of cholera (I am not referring to the external symptoms—cramps, vomiting, etc.—which are merely corollaries) is a general decrease in organic heat. This decrease persists and becomes more pronounced as the disease progresses, until it becomes the primary phenomenon.

It is therefore the *Thân* element that is diminished; the pathogenic entry (ingr. m.) can thus only be in the *Thânhoa*, the physical locus of *the Thân's* movement, and this pathogenic entry must be taken into account in the treatment. Let us examine the consequences. The *Thân*, although not receiving the motor impulse, is in no way attacked in its essence (being immortal, it can only be attacked by a *retrograde* manifestation of the *Wun* element). However, since it retains all its vigour but lacks the means to employ it, it departs from its natural location and function; it remains intimately linked to *Khi*, since life persists; but, due to the loss of movement, it no longer reaches the *Tinh* element. Therefore (and this is how cholera differs from pernicious fevers), having no lower elements to replace (which are all, at least so far, healthy and normal), the *Thânkhi* manifests externally and tends to escape from the body. This is the first cause of death in cholera; it is this that is at work in the condition known as 'fulminant specific enteritis'.

However, due to the natural (one might say, semi-intuitive) inclination of *the Khi* to step in and replace the missing intermediary (this customary tendency of the fourth element has already been observed in the pattern of death), *the Khiphoî*, anxious like the whole organism, does its best to make up for the absence of *the Thânkhi*; leaving the *Maû* element, it disrupts the blood flow and the balance of the internal organism. This is indeed the cooling of the blood; and, when this cooling

intensifies, or lasts too long, it becomes the second cause of death, the one to which patients most commonly succumb.

It is easy to recognise the phases of this pattern in the illness, from the cooling of the body to numbness, haematemesis (the blood, too, is expelled as best it can) to confusion and temporary unconsciousness, which manifest during the course of the illness but generally cease as death approaches (due to the return of *the Khiphoî* to the area abandoned by the *Thânkhi*). At this point there is a temporary improvement, which is usually deceptive; however, if the *Khiphoî* is extremely strong (if the patient is very robust in terms of the lower elements), it can draw the *Thânkhi* back, through the special magnetism of this element, and thus save the patient.

It is to exacerbate the Khi, by means of the *Khiphoî*, that, from the very first onset, stimulants such as absinthe and champagne are administered to the patient. However, in the case of endemic cholera, the preventive remedy is indicated by pathogenic therapy, as derived from the pattern, and must be administered even before any prodromal symptoms appear.

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The pattern of pernicious fevers is not at all similar to that of cholera, and yet the two diseases begin in a similar manner. It is here (and I have deliberately chosen this example) that the usefulness, indeed the very necessity, of the pathogenic examination becomes clear.

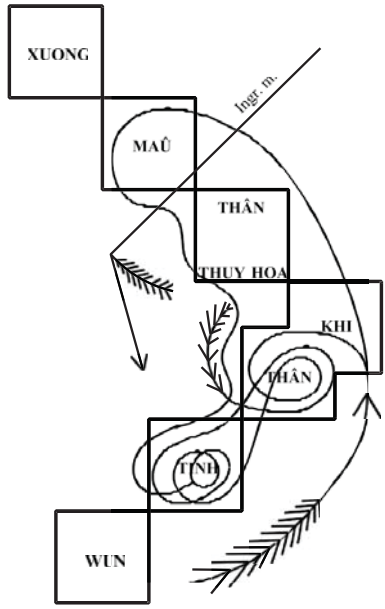

Fig. 6 - Pernicious fever.

The initial symptom of pernicious fevers is also a general chill, followed by the same physical symptoms (vomiting, bloody stools, cramps). But the subsequent course of the disease allows us to conclude that, whilst the effect is similar, the cause is entirely different. Indeed (and there is no other way to explain the resulting pathological phenomena), the onset of the disease affects the *Thânthuy*, that is to say, the movement of the lower elements (whereas cholera affects the movement of the upper elements). The cessation of this movement causes, within the bloodstream, a disturbance that results in a slowing down and a cooling, the direct and secondary cause of the disease's first symptom. When the onset of the disease is sudden and violent, the shock produced is such that it can lead to death: the patient then appears to succumb to the sudden cooling; and this is what is known as the pernicious attack of the algid form, which is indeed frequently fatal. Otherwise, the phenomena follow one another with implacable logic. The movement of *the Thânthuy*, diverted but not destroyed, wanders towards the movement of *the Thânhoa*, to exacerbate the *Thân*. The *Thân* is thus excited to such an extent that it seizes the entire *Khi* (just as electricity, violently released, takes as its conductor everything within its reach). In certain cases, the *Khiphoî*, which it seizes, is dragged along in this blood whirlwind (as in the case of muscular and sanguine constitutions). And so, since the blood is not driven by its usual movement, the *Thânkhi* takes the place of the missing movement within the lower vortex, and causes, in an organism unprepared for its arrival, the same devastation as a force of a hundred horses suddenly unleashed in a mechanism designed to withstand the effort of only ten horses. There is therefore, in this case, in the lower elements, a stagnation, accompanied by a violent combustion of the blood, conducive to zymotic disease, and a rise in temperature capable of causing the greatest disorders.

But this is not enough to characterise the pattern or course of the disease. Indeed, there remains (due to the exacerbation of *Thân* by a driving force more powerful than in normal life) a surplus of unoccupied *Thân*; moreover, the *Khi*, stripped of its role as intermediary, naturally tends to come and fill it, and, to do so, to abandon the abnormal role of destruction, through overheating, which it plays in the lower elements. For this twofold reason, a moment comes when part of this exacerbated *Thân* finds itself free, and outside the grip of *the Khi* (whereas in the normal state, it is always the *Khi* that is in excess of *the Thân*). Left to its own devices, both by reflex and through its elemental attraction, the *Thân* rushes towards the *Tinh*, which is not normally affected by the intellectual nodus, and inflicts upon it the dual ravages of its exacerbation and its isolation: this is the final phase of the pernicious fit. It corresponds to delirium, to feverish madness, with, as an immediate physical consequence, meningeal haemorrhage, hemiplegia, coma and insensate death. The diagram thus accurately reproduces and, through the logical deduction of its lines, anticipates all the phenomena of the attack.

All direct diseases can thus be reduced to: 1. By the observation of the first symptom;

2° By applying it to the pattern of normal life;

to a graphical representation and a deductive, one might say algebraic, line of reasoning, inasmuch as its consequences necessarily and clearly follow one from the other. This reasoning and this construction will invariably indicate the element specifically affected at each stage of the illness; if it has been correctly conceived, it must essentially reproduce all the external phenomena observed in the patient, and reproduce them on the diagram at the precise moment they occur in reality, in conjunction with such and such symptoms, such and such pathological changes.

It would obviously be superfluous to go any further: the study of a hundred diagrams would be no more convincing than the study of just two. One can see, by reflecting on the experiment, what results such a method may yield. However, to demonstrate this with entirely new examples, I shall focus on two specific cases: that in which, without being afflicted by disease, the human organism is subject to external influences—whether beneficial or deleterious—which temporarily alter its modalities (such as, for example, the effects of intoxicants and all organoleptic agents), and that in which the pathogenic influence, by not attacking any of the lower elements, escapes pathology: I am referring to mental and nervous disorders, which science has not yet resolved, because it is unaware of or misunderstands their seat. These diseases can only be precisely defined by a method of psychological pathogenesis such as the one I have just outlined, a method in which the means of diagnosis and the means of treatment are on the same intellectual, moral or psychological plane as the conditions they claim to discover and cure.

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Physical intoxication can be summarised as intoxication from wine or any alcohol. Intellectual intoxication can be summarised as that caused by opium (but not by morphine or other narcotics, whose effects are not at all analogous, for they act first upon the lower faculties, and only subsequently upon the higher ones).

The patterns of intoxication are superimposed; that is to say, they do not halt the normal course of life, but in order to experience the true life of the human being under the influences in question, one must superimpose the patterns of intoxication onto the pattern of life, without allowing the graphs of one to influence the graph of the other. Thus, in existence, the influence of intoxication momentarily overlays the vital influences of the organs.

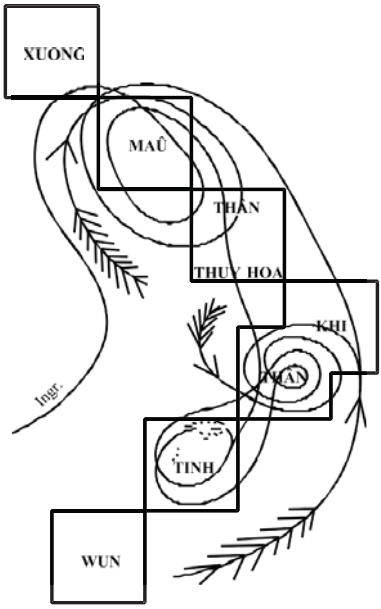

Fig. 7 – Physical intoxication.

In the case of physical intoxications, the symptom is an increase in heat in the blood and in the speed of its circulation. It is indeed in the *Maû* element that alcoholic intoxication makes its ingress of influence. The heat and movement, introduced by alcohol into the organism, immediately affect the physical nodus, which they accelerate and whose amplitude they increase. Under these conditions, the *Khiphoî* is no longer sufficient, with its ordinary capacity, to regulate the nodus; and, to avoid any direct disturbance, it calls upon a quantity of *Khi* corresponding to the amount of external influence introduced; this quantity of *Khi* comes to its aid and ensures a normal superficial flow of the lower elements, but with a rise in temperature due to the quantitative increase in the vortex. This rise and this acceleration cause cirrhosis. – Now the *Thânkhi* sees its composition altered, and the *Thân* becomes, contrary to the norm, the dominant element; the quantity of *Thân*, corresponding to the quantity of *Khi* that has left the *Thânkhi*, finds itself free and strays into *Tinh*, where it causes the usual damage; this is the delirium and agitation of intoxication. If the external influence increases further, the temperature of the blood vortex also rises, and, likewise, the quantity of *Thân* released; beyond a limit which the therapist can easily determine, the state of *the dead drunk* appears, with, in the excessively exacerbated blood centre, nervous attack and degeneration of the heart, and, in the intellectual centre, deprived of an element, catalepsy, delirium tremens, and coma. For reasons of material analogy, a sudden change in external temperature, such as a sudden exposure to cold air, is harmful to the body in a state of physical intoxication and may lead to congestion.

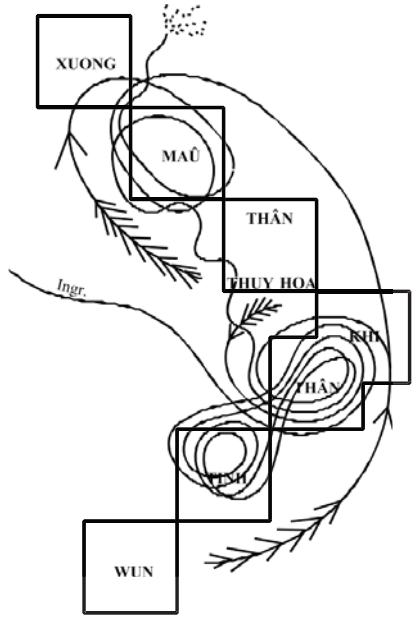

Fig. 8 – Mental intoxication.

Intellectual intoxication manifests itself in a peculiar, apparent lightness of the lower elements, within which a gentle, fleeting acrodynia swarms. It affects the *Thân*, heightens the faculties of *the Thânkhi*, and stimulates its activity; the first effect is to dispel all mental heaviness and drowsiness, to enlighten the intellect, to clarify ideas, to recall the past, and to enhance memory. However, to be maintained within its customary limits, the *Thân* in this state requires a greater quantity of *Khi*; and the *Khi*, with an instinctive intuition that its presence is necessary, is drawn sympathetically towards the *Thân*; there is therefore a decrease in *Khiphoî* and, consequently, a slowing down and cooling of the blood node, which manifests itself immediately (especially in hot countries) as adiaphoresis. If the influence increases further, the clarity of *the* unweighed *Tinh* can lead to hallucination (ecstasy, out-of-body experiences, bilocation and all other psychic phenomena). By reflexive analogy, achromasia sets in, anaemia takes hold of the body, which withers, becomes cachectic, and may descend to the most irremediable physiological misery of tabes.

This rigorous observation already yields a practical consequence, namely that no one has lied in declaring opium the universal Nepenthe, and that all cures, all relief, and also all intellectual enlightenment can be obtained through use of the drug appropriate to the desired result, but with scrupulous dosage and infrequent use. And it is also true that abuse, or even temporary excess, can lead to serious disorders. It must therefore always be used with wisdom and discernment, when appropriate. But it should be noted, from the outset, that the intoxication (or rather the exaltation) of opium cannot in any way be compared to the intoxication of alcohol, any more than an intellectual can be compared to an animal,

since the former satisfies the curiosity of the mind, whilst the latter satisfies the disordered appetites of the brute.

It should also be noted that the use of alcohol in intoxicating doses is just as pernicious as the abuse to which it inevitably leads; whereas the stimulation provided by opium is sometimes beneficial, always harmless, provided (and this does not require a great deal of willpower) that this stimulation is always kept within the same limits.

The effect of alcohol abuse is blood congestion, nervous delirium and cerebral anaemia; the effect of opium abuse is physical cachexia, nervous allotroism and mental hallucination. This can easily be seen, moreover, by comparing their patterns with the dual pattern of madness.

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Eastern pathogenesis boldly enters the realm of mental (intellectual) and nervous (psychic) disorders. To these two classes of conditions, it rigorously applies its deductive method of diacritical diagnosis and treatment. I do not claim that it succeeds in everything and always; however, we shall see, in the pathological applications, that, under certain conditions, the Eastern *Tongsang* radically cure epilepsy. The same is true in northern India, Burma and Tibet. I do not believe I am venturing too far in declaring true the hypothesis that can lead to such an extraordinary practical result.

In cases of insanity, the affliction (we need not concern ourselves here with symptoms, since the affliction is psychological, and the symptom can only be physical or intellectual) strikes the *Thân* directly, diminishing its value and halting its normal functioning in its tracks.

It is worth noting here just how important the question of the pathological onset is, and what a difference is observed, depending on its nature, in the immediate outcomes. (Compare, in fact, the diseases that strike first: either the *Thân*, to diminish or increase it; or the motor of *the Thân*, to increase or decrease its functions or modalities, or its attraction towards the *Khi*, such that the former diseases affect its very nature, whilst the latter affect only its manifestations).

The primary consequence of this reduction in *the Thân's* efficacy is cerebral anaemia (manifesting in visual disturbances, and later in those of the spinal cord). The second consequence is this: although the *Thân* has lost the strength necessary to move within *the Tinh*, it has lost nothing of itself, and the *Thânkhi* remains psychically intact. It must therefore move, and it no longer moves in its normal direction; thus it moves away from *Tinh*, and may even go so far as to leave the human body.

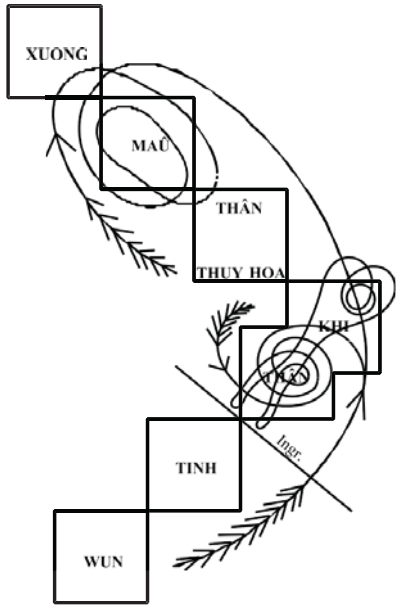

Fig. 9 – Idiocy.

First comes simplicity, then hesitation in speech, then the loss of the association of ideas, and finally the very forgetting of the idea (rather than the intrinsic loss of the idea), that is to say, idiocy, and speech, having become useless because it has nothing left to express, is transformed into animal cries. Finally, it should be noted that the blood-node retains its vigour and mechanism intact; and, indeed, physical health is rarely impaired in idiots, and only as a reflex effect. This is what the pattern of 'calm and inert madness' indicates: does it not correspond with the observations of psychiatrists and medical directors of asylums?

In raving madness, the morbid onset also occurs on the *Thân*, psychically. But, instead of moving in the opposite direction to the movement imparted by the *Thânhoa*, the evil comes in the same direction, and accelerates said movement out of all proportion, exasperating the *Thân* beyond its limits.

The first consequence is that the *Qi*, driven by an abnormal force, forms a *Thânkhi* node in addition to the localised one; it moves from the heart to the brain, and madness sets in. If the pathological cause persists, the *Thân* becomes further overloaded, and, freed from *the Khi*—which is already entirely occupied—causes the greatest havoc: these are the fits of furious delirium, of savage madness, in which the entire body is shaken, and where one is forced to defend the madman against himself by coercive means. Finally, when this dreadful state persists for a long time, the *Khiphoî*, shaken by these upheavals, abandons the blood knot to come – though mostly in vain – and attempt to restore the broken mental equilibrium. It is at this stage that one observes the morbid languor of the mad and their general anaemia.

We can see from the diagram that raging madness is physically more dangerous than idiocy, and that, not counting cerebral haemorrhage—which is always possible during fits—it presents numerous risks of death. Yet it offers a chance of recovery that quiet madness offers in no instance.

Indeed, since any mental decline affects the intellect first, the means—not to prevent the possible harm—but to remedy the harm already done, are beyond human power: there is no, nor can there be, any material remedy acting upon the intellect when the mediator *Thânkhi* has left its station and has, consequently, withdrawn from all attempts. There is a *fundamental* difference between the end and the means, which means that the end cannot be attained, and that if an unfortunate person afflicted with idiocy is cured, it is – to use the customary terminology – a pure stroke of chance, or a special manifestation of the Higher Power.

In raving madness, on the contrary, whilst it is not possible, under the circumstances of ordinary life, to act upon the explosive *Thân*, it is at least possible, by resorting almost to physical force, to act upon the *Khi*, so as to render it as demonstrative and as agile as the exacerbated *Thân*, whose rapidity it no longer matched. This treatment, which focuses entirely on the *Thân-Khi*, can only be carried out by transferring the entire *Khi* to the level of *the Thân*, that is to say, to the great detriment of the lower organism. But it is among the things that are possible, among the things worth attempting; and, if it succeeds, restoring vigour to the exhausted lower elements is a far less serious and delicate problem than the one that has previously been resolved.

I shall, moreover, attempt in this therapeutic context to outline (albeit briefly, for the scope of this summary work cannot claim to offer the highly interesting elaborations of a didactic thesis, but merely clarifies the causes and indicates the effects to the reader's understanding, who must elucidate the former and develop the latter) the kind of treatment, according to Eastern medicine, that is appropriate for this class of diseases which, in the West, exist alongside modern science and show little mercy to their victims.

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I shall conclude this brief pathogenetic study (which I could have expanded into a substantial volume, had I had the leisure and curiosity to elaborate on simple deductions) by identifying the pathogenic onset of the disease reputed to be incurable: epilepsy.

The diagram depicts only one of the vibrating convulsions of a full-blown fit, convulsions that are essentially transient; for any prolongation – however slight – of the state shown in the diagram would inevitably lead to death, through the violent disjunction of the dual element *Thânkhi*. It is evident, upon examining the lines, that in the ordinary state, the epileptic is in normal health; the actions of *Thânthuy* on the blood, and of *Thânhoa* on the *Thân*, take place regularly, and the life-giving *Khi* manifests itself in an orderly manner. The pathological influence therefore does not strike one of the elements, but insinuates itself between two elements, and specifically between the *Thân* and the *Khi*, whose close and constant union is the inescapable condition of existence. Epilepsy is therefore nothing more than the intermittent struggle between the pathological cause, which seeks to

separate the *Tkânkhi*, and these two elements, which, unable to live apart, constantly reunite. The epileptic seizure is merely the direct consequence of the jolts imparted to the endangered psychic node. This back-and-forth movement is known in China as *Bat-Giaoi*.

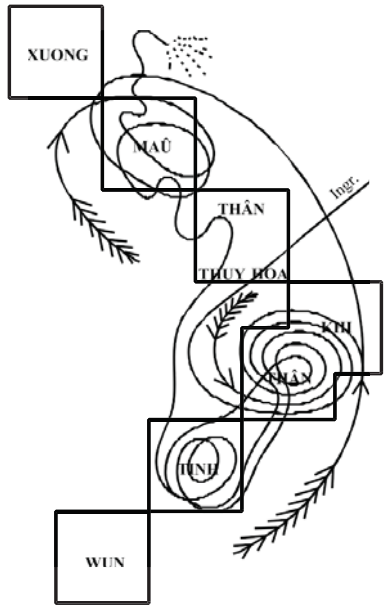

Fig. 10 – Frenzies.

At this almost imperceptible critical moment, the *Thân* and the *Khi* no longer interact; they do not cease to be fundamentally linked, since life persists; but the repulsive force that sets them against one another directs their modes and manifestations in opposite directions. The *Thân*, deprived of its regulator, invades the *Tinh* alone, destroying its order, and produces within it a series of revolutions so rapid that they fail to affect the victim's higher faculties; the psychic centre is essentially destroyed; all sensitivity is abolished, as is the persistence of any feeling; amnesia is total, with no possibility of recognition; the union of the two groups of elements, whilst not broken, no longer produces any reciprocal effect or reflex. Violently torn from its normal life, the *Khi* rushes exuberantly towards the blood nodus, which it exacerbates, develops, and whose harmony it destroys through overabundance: hence the resulting nervous disorders, pauses and irregularities in the pulse, convulsions, and eclampsic spasms that accompany the attacks, and sometimes even the fixed, wide-eyed stare and tetanic rigidity. The entire organism is then subjected to violent excitement, punctuated by sudden pauses, and resuming in a disordered movement that shakes the human machine. But it must be borne in mind that this dislocation, which leaves none of the elements in place, does not affect the essence of any of them, and that, consequently, the life of the epileptic is not in danger. The sole cause of weakness is the wear and tear of the lower elements, prematurely overworked; the only possibility of danger is, in

a more violent seizure, such a shattering of *the Thân* that a passing delirium survives the fit. But in no case can epilepsy, intrinsically, lead to death unless, by a great stroke of chance, the disjunctive cause were to have a sufficiently prolonged effect to, through the affected modalities of *the Thânkhi*, deeply affect the substance of the element and thus cause sudden death through the unforeseen disintegration of the element that serves as the vehicle of total existence.

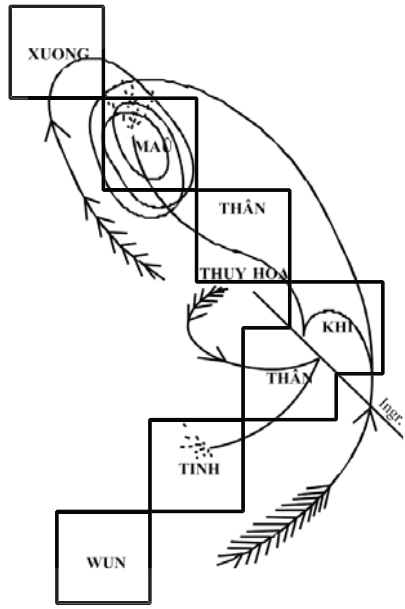

Fig. 11 – Epilepsy.

This is what, quite apart from any observation, the *Dongkinh* (epilepsy) diagram indicates, when its consequences are considered. It must be acknowledged that this is an exact description of the symptoms, the course and the consequences of the disease, as well as the phenomena accompanying the seizures. It is therefore reasonable to believe that, since the principle has logically produced consequences whose veracity is confirmed by experience every day, this principle is correct.

It remains to find the remedy – on a similar level – that will eliminate the primary cause: this is the concern of therapeutics.

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In concluding this brief account of an unknown aetiology, I should like to emphasise the particularly reliable nature of a diagnosis made on the basis of such principles, and the almost prophetic certainty regarding the duration of an illness or the strength of a condition, calculated, so to speak, mathematically from such data. The extensive familiarity that Eastern practitioners have with these formulas and their

immediate adaptation to every possible case, the long study, patiently begun from childhood, of principles constantly tested before their very eyes (for such sciences are almost always hereditary), their profound acognosia, the long-acquired skill of eye and hand, the very special subtlety of a mind as subtle in its distinctions as it is bold in its conceptions, and, above all, perhaps, the innate confidence of the Sages in the ancient science they practise – a confidence that has spread throughout the people – give the teachings and practices of the therapists a certainty, a sort of infallibility in diagnosis, conclusions and predictions, which seems to border on an inner vision of the hidden and a divinatory perception of the future.

We shall therefore no longer be surprised by accounts of miraculous cures, by solutions proposed to problems whose very description is frightening, nor by the extraordinary success of this teaching, nor even by the apparent implausibility of this or that true fact. For we shall consider that, with a skill that only a long knowledge of mankind can bestow, the healers have – whilst feigning to disdain it – maintained the admiration of the peoples, and that, to succeed, beyond their experience and the science of the Ancestors, ceaselessly augmented by their meditations, they add the supreme lever of popular faith in their thaumaturgical powers, a faith that strengthens them, enlivens them, renders them invincible—that faith which all great founders have claimed for their works, and which makes the impossible easy, and the incomprehensible clear.

CHAPTER IX

Contemporary Taoism

I have said, in the preceding pages, all that can be said about Taoism. I have said far more than had been said before me. Barring ethnic revolutions, which are not to be foreseen, and which would, in any case, be preceded by the violent and conquering victory of the yellow race over the white race, nothing more will ever be said.

But one must realise that Taoism, as it has been revealed to us, is quite different from what we say of it: one must realise above all that Taoism, as it is, is quite different from what people have chosen to tell us about it. However well-prepared he may be, however sympathetic he may appear, a white man will never attain to full knowledge – I do not say of the Primordial Yellow Tradition – but of the consequences that this Primordial Tradition carries within it, and brings forth daily, for modern times as well as for times to come.

As one of the preceding chapters suggests, the study of Taoism is not today closed merely to analytical minds, nor to all those elements which are, *a priori*, averse to the reasoned reconstruction of the original synthesis: Taoism, now the soul of the Chinese ethnic movement, and indeed the Sino-Japanese one, whilst remaining an abrupt tradition to Westerners, has become a science closed to white people. Having been a means of supreme and imperious asceticism, it has also become a method of ethnic evolution, and perhaps a lever for political revolution; and, as such, it has become as inviolable and sacred as the most intimate secrets of national defences could ever have been in Europe.

Since it became the preserve, the driving force and the linchpin of Chinese secret societies, Taoism no longer defends itself solely through the extreme loftiness of its insights and the extreme rigidity of its logic; it is defended, against indiscretions and even possible knowledge, by all those who, in whatever capacity, form part of an occult movement, and regard Taoism as an exclusive heritage, and as the most powerful agent in shaping the future destinies of Asia.

And no more than in the past – indeed, even less so than in the past – is there any possibility of brotherhood between yellow communities and white communities. There can only be individual affiliations of white people with yellow communities, the aim of which is not only to attract them intellectually, but also, and above all, to annihilate them politically. On the other hand, I am unaware of, and believe to be fundamentally impossible, the affiliation of a yellow individual with a white community.

But, I repeat very clearly, there is no practical common ground between the collective societies of the two races; and if, by some impossibility, as a result of an

organisation whose methods are beyond our grasp, such common ground were to come into existence, the yellow communities would refuse to step onto it.

This is why it is impossible to give credence to a piece of information that is already old – and which I certainly would not have mentioned had its repetition in the volume **The Yellow Invasion**, by Commander Driant, not drawn attention to it – information according to which a Yellow secret society and a European occultist group are said to have fraternally united their aims and symbols.

'We are pleased to announce,' says the magazine *L'Initiation* of March 1897 (and Commander Driant repeats this in **L'Invasion jaune**, p. 486), to the Supreme Council, the creation in San Francisco of the first Chinese Martinist lodge, on which we pin great hopes for the understanding between our order and the *Society of Hung*."

And Commander Driant adds: "The *Hung Society* is the parent society of *the* Chinese *Boxers*. These sectarian connections will seem implausible to many readers, who fail to see the progress of occult societies aiming for internationalism. They are strictly true."

These claims are *nothing but* a fairy tale. I do not know whether any Chinese people, or what sort of Chinese people, ever joined the Martinist Lodge in San Francisco, or even whether there ever was a Martinist Lodge in San Francisco. What I do know and affirm is that the *Hung Society* – since there is indeed *a Hung Society* and since the reference seems to be to one society in particular, and to the specific and temporary name of a sect within that society – has never been affiliated with Martinism; that the *Hung Society*, nor any other Chinese secret society whatsoever, has ever maintained the slightest relationship, even by correspondence, with Martinism, nor with any other Western occult society whatsoever.

To engage in such a thing, the Chinese know the Western temperament all too well, and how little secrecy there is in their occult societies.

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Moreover, by their very constitution and purpose, the secret societies of the East and West present a perfect antithesis, just as Taoism and a Western religion (Roman Christianity, for example, or Lutheran or Genevan Christianity) present absolute divergences (I am no longer speaking here, of course, of doctrine) in terms of representative value, influence, synthesis, ethnic intellectuality, etc. And this determination will perfectly illustrate how Taoism is the repository of the Yellow tradition, and how it has been and will be the generator of all the movements that explain and transform this tradition. We shall thus see why and how the permanence of this primordial Tradition seems assured, and how it is destined to always play the principal and guiding role in the evolution of the race.

Between societies, as between the traditional religions of the two races, the antithesis that presents itself is identical to itself. The Western occult group

consists of a minority of individuals who seek to impose their own viewpoint on the nation. The Eastern secret society is composed of individuals who, having sought out, understood and identified the deep-seated aspirations and enduring needs of the race, create a new doctrine for it, or adapt the old doctrine to those needs.

The Western group, driven by its own particular interests and group advantage, seeks to make the general interest conform to these, and to bend the nation to ideas or actions that are of no concern to it, or even harmful, and which are, in any case, alien to its ethnic and collective needs. Eastern society, if necessary, enlightens the race regarding its general interest, and presents it with the intellectual and material means to secure these benefits.

The Western group, in order to convince the nation of an illusion, is bound to resort to spectacle, propaganda, public campaigns, political action—in short, to all actions aimed at establishing, through a brilliant façade, a sentimental and irrational conviction. Eastern society, with the utmost reserve and a secrecy that is the source of its strength, confines itself to the simple and logical exposition of a situation whose flaws are known to every citizen, and to which it brings, for every citizen, immediate improvements.

The Western group, having created a conviction, is compelled, lest it be consumed by its own nothingness, to direct it: it requires, whether covertly or not, the power of public authority. It therefore 'binds', guides and directly commands the actions of the nation. Eastern society, having shown the way to the people, gives them the means to follow it, 'frees' them from those who stand in their way, and allows them to proceed of their own accord, in the direction that is obvious to all and in the best interests of the people.

The Western group therefore inevitably generates authority, a taste for authority and ambition; Eastern society inevitably generates freedom, a taste for independence and indifference to honours.

To compensate the nation for the collective freedom it has had to take away from it in order to steer it towards its own ends, the Western group is obliged to offer it satisfactions outside that freedom. It compels the nation to create new needs for itself; it exacerbates old needs; and by satisfying them, even if they run counter to health and natural law, it provides this nation with a wealth of material pleasures for which it remains grateful, through the lowest strata of the national collective, and thanks to which it forgets the loss of its freedom, the desire for its general welfare, and its own blindness. Eastern society, which has sought nothing for itself, and which has guided the race towards its normal and beneficial path, without selfishness and without conflict with ethnic tradition or nature, Eastern society, instead of having assumed the duty of inferior compensation, has acquired the right to counsel; and it teaches, by its example alone, that the race, in possession of its rightful place and its normal destiny, attains happiness, not by accumulating pleasures, but by restraining its desires.

Now, what is the result of this conduct, so briefly summarised? Here it is, without a doubt. Man, simple and trusting at first, is not forever a fool. The sophisms, of which he was the credulous approver, the errors of which he was subsequently the easy victim, teach him through experience, and inspire in him, through reflection, a salutary mistrust. Thus, ce are those very ones , who the deceived him, who him

learn not to be misled again. Thus, the man who has realised that he has been deceived, led down a path that was not that of humanity but only that of a few individuals or groups, withdraws his trust and esteem from those who guided him, and resolves firmly to guide himself or to seek guidance from others. But, as he only arrives at this insight and this resolution once those who have abused him have become his masters, he has no recourse but to intrigue, revolt and revolution; and, despite the education that shaped a false nature within him, his true nature ultimately demands so imperiously that he resigns himself to using violence or cunning to regain his normality. And so, fighting his conqueror with his own weapons, he forms new secret groups, in the image of the first, but which are no more worthy of the goal towards which he strives, and which he will likely never attain. Therein lies the cause, the secret and the mechanism of the West's pathological ethnic, economic and political instability.

The result achieved by Eastern secret societies is quite the opposite. Constantly enlightened, without having been compelled to any reciprocal obligation, regarding his path and the general and ongoing interest he has in adhering to it, the man of the yellow race, through the action of the secret society—which is the ethnic quintessence of that race—attains both the knowledge of his advantage and the power to secure it. Not out of gratitude, but out of the conviction that he is serving his own interests, he is inclined to call upon the groups through which he occupies such a solid and beneficial position; and quite naturally, he seeks and utilises, in the tranquillity of peace and power, the counsel of those who have secured for him that peace and power. What secret societies have not sought, they find all the more certainly precisely because they have not sought it: 'influence', or the exercise of power without the title, that is to say, without the drawbacks attached to power—envy, anxiety and ambition. And, in this social order, there are no discontented people, because everyone is sufficiently happy according to their station; and everyone is happy because everyone is in their rightful place, in the State as in the universe.

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We can make similar observations regarding the religious state of the West and the traditional state of the East. And we immediately grasp how Western 'revelations' reflect the insecurity and vague sentimentality of white people, and how Eastern tradition reflects the logic and immutable clarity of yellow people.

Religion or tradition—for they are absolutely one and the same—cannot be in contradiction with humanity, nor can it constrain it, by very definition. Tradition is, in fact, nothing other than the summary of the primordial teachings upon which humanity has established itself, been enlightened, and elevated; it is a condensed synthesis, containing in embryo all that man can be: it is the intellectual magma of the ancestors, it is the cosmic quintessence of humanity. Since it is the very source from which human conception sprang, the conceptions of

men cannot be opposed to it. And it is in reality the natural norm of the humanity it has created, which it contains in potential, which it continually generates, and which it drives towards its beneficial evolution. If, therefore, Tradition remains true to itself—that is to say, if it is not narrowed or distorted by those charged with transmitting it—humanity will always remain in harmony with it; for it embodies universal human truths from which humanity could not free itself without ceasing to be humanity; and it has no specialisations so narrow (and consequently so contrary to its very nature and purpose) that the various intellectual and scientific advances, a natural consequence of the evolutionary labour of humankind, cannot be reconciled with it. And one might almost say that the best proof that Tradition remains intact is that all ages, all situations, and all movements of humanity are in harmony with it and refer to it.

From this principle follows a most interesting consequence, to which we shall return later, in **The Social Path**, but which is worth mentioning here. This consequence is that Tradition is never sentimental. Sentiment is not a universal phenomenon; it is a contingency acquired by humanity, and this contingency has been created and is created every day within individuals, under the influence of the events they witness or of which they are contemporaries. There are therefore different forms of sentimentality for every period of history, for every nation on the globe, indeed, for every continent and every climate. A Tradition that had a sentimental aspect would therefore be a temporary and local tradition, lacking the necessary condition of universality; it would no longer be Tradition.

Therefore, and *a priori*, any sentimental tradition is a false tradition, or at least a pejorative distortion of Tradition.

Tradition, always true to itself in its essence, and so universal that it encompasses and permits all progress made and yet to be made, thus embraces and holds close to itself all of humanity, which it inspires. Men are truly its children, and it forms with them a single whole: it in the direction and the power, they in the following and the application. Thus the primal harmony continues and endures. And at the same time, through the all-powerful force of this harmony, and through the multiplying effect of this continuity, there is no human achievement that cannot be attained.

I have no desire here, of course, to criticise any religion or any form of Westernism whatsoever; but I am permitted to contrast the constant, practical and harmonious development of the yellow race throughout its Tradition with the cataclysms, upheavals, violence and persecutions that have shaken the West. I am permitted to recount the threefold form of the most modern revelation, that of the New Testament, this Christic New Testament, which is contrary to and not a consequence of the Jehovahist Old Testament. In this threefold form, we see the inevitable history of dogmas—past, present and future—since, in order to impose themselves upon the masses, they require an authority, whencever it may come. The admirable Eastern and Essene teaching of Christ Jesus, who took his doctrine and even his very name from the cradle of the human spirit, spread like a blazing fire throughout the entire white race, which instinctively recognised in it the clarity and freshness of the primal source, and drank deeply of it, in spite of Herod, in spite of Rome and

the beasts of the circus. Later, the rival ambitions of the Apostles' successors, and the successive creations of the popes, by diverting the Christic tradition from the natural human path, meant that, in order to have their new aims accepted, the leaders of the distorted revelation had to resort to force to impose both the beliefs they had decreed and their personal influence, to which they were as attached as to their beliefs. And finally, a millennium later, stripped of their prestige by the revolt of disillusioned men (whether they were called Huss, Luther, Calvin or otherwise), and deprived of their material power by indifferent rulers, when those who had proclaimed themselves the masters of a religion, in which the founder had seen only brothers, felt themselves stripped of their power over bodies, they replaced it with power over souls, offering the wretched the lure of distant rewards, and causing their dogmas to stumble in the deceptive sweetness of sentimentality.

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Tradition – of which Taoism is the intellectual synthesis suited to the minds of the yellow race – Tradition, augmented by the forms successively lent to it by generations, is in reality the model of human asceticism, presented to all living men by the totality of men who have come into life and departed from it. The shaping is reciprocal; and whilst it is true that each generation contributes to Tradition a little of its own particular understanding, it is even more true that Tradition imbues each generation with its immutable sap, ever identical to itself, and that thus, through the shifting prisms of customs, initiations and ages, the race, supported by Tradition, presents to universal history a homogeneous type, in which the yellow of five thousand years ago would recognise itself, just as the yellow of five thousand years hence would.

This homogeneous type is in reality a prototype; it is a sort of Adam (in the occult sense) for the Yellow race; it is the man of the race; it is the Great Ancestor made earthly. It is to this ethnic collective, the foundation of all Yellow metaphysical thought, that all living beings refer; it is into this that, after death, each generation returns, *in the eyes of the next generation*; and each of these generations, through this fictitious reintegration – which is really nothing more than the passing of the years – brings to the *Race* its coefficient of evolution and its special source of energy for the march forward through the cycles of days and the spiral of asceticism. I do not wish to delve any further into this mystery; anyone can do so just as well as I, based on the facts I have just set out. One need only know that this is the origin of that 'cult of the ancestors', which has caused so much ink to flow from the pens of sinologists, and so much bile to flow from the souls of missionaries.

I do not wish to claim—even though civilisation had penetrated deeply into all classes of this people, who were already more civilised than the Greeks even in the days of the republics of Hellas and the Peloponnese—I do not claim that such a metaphysical concept was familiar to labourers and merchants; rather, I believe that these people, in honouring 'the Ancestors', were honouring the elderly elders whom they

had known or of whom they had heard, and whose 'tablet' still presided over the most appropriate place in the family home. But, among all the learned – and we know how numerous they are and that they come from every conceivable social stratum – it is certain that the worship of the Ancestors is nothing other than the veneration of the collective Ancestor, which grows daily, and will only attain its full being when, the human cycle having ended, all men are reunited in its Unity.

It is therefore, if one cares to delve deeply into the symbolism, on the level of humanity, the worship of the Absolute. Those who, in this wholly metaphysical veneration, thought they discerned a 'cult' paid to dead human beings, lacked a little patience, a great deal of study, and no doubt even more true understanding[1] .

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In concluding this lengthy exposition of the Primordial Tradition and the Taoism that emanates from it, one will better understand the points on which I emphasised at the outset[2] . The Tradition, by remaining general, and Taoism, by not specifying itself as a religion, have in no way diminished themselves by restricting their scope of application.

A religion – however holy it may be (assuming that something holy can be practised by men), however divine it may be (assuming that something divine can be confined to the understanding and regulation of individuals) – diminishes and is impoverished by the very fact and at the very moment that it calls itself a religion. It immediately satisfies man, who, as an ironic philosopher once said, is a religious animal. But man is more than a religious animal; he is at the same time a passionate, volitional, instinctive, appetitive animal, and so on. For as long as he satisfies these innumerable qualities, he is not satisfied as a religious animal; and so, during that very time, he forgets his religion, and that there is one. Viewed in this light, religion is the satisfaction of a need; and even when that need no longer exists, when it has diminished or been obliterated (like the last vertebrae and the appendix), man still satisfies it, out of habit, obedience or fear. Such is the fate of every religion that has become contingent, believing thereby to better engage, better grasp, better command the contingent individual that is man.

Tradition, which remains tradition—that is to say, wilfully ignorant of the very existence of any contingency (an existence which, as we know, is merely a relation)—Tradition does not affect man as a religious animal; it affects him as a man, with all the qualifiers, that is to say, without qualifiers and without determination. The religious man is content with a certain understanding

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[1] We shall return to the subject of ancestor worship in the *Social Path*.
[2] *Metaphysical Path*, Chap. I.

of Tradition; the logical man, with another; and, likewise, the emotional, passionate, ritualistic, social, poor, rich, merchant, learned, solitary, family-oriented man, and *so on* and so forth.

Everywhere, Tradition embraces him, whether he thinks of it or not. It is Tradition that makes his laws, that preserves his status, that has created his politics, that dictates respect for the dead and courtesy towards the living, and social rules, and literary ambition, and the taste for knowledge and study, and hierarchies, and rites, and even the manner of dying. It is all of him, and he is all within it. He cannot escape it; nor, for that matter, does he wish to or even think of it; for he leans so heavily upon it that he is, so to speak, identified with it, to the point of being its transient and living form, just as the Ancestors are its synthesised and immortal expression.

This is why, unlike traditions that have specialised in religions to better grasp the passions of man, which have taken on passions to command him by resembling him, and which, along with his passions, have taken on his mortal weakness, the Yellow Tradition, even in its passage upon the earth, partakes of the conscious immobility and the permanence of the principles it represents and from which it emanates, and it leads to this permanence the faithful adepts who follow it, and who henceforth, thanks to the precautions of its Sages and a long atavism, can no longer fail to follow it. – Such is the scope and duration of the Yellow Tradition. One does not create an immortal Tradition; it creates itself, and every day grows and strengthens through the energies brought to it, after their death, by those who have loved it.

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It is only to superficial minds and to politicians whose short-sightedness is confined to the movements of the present moment that the famous ‘awakening of the Yellow Race’ may appear to contradict the preceding teachings, and not to be a direct consequence of the traditionalism we have just studied.

We shall have occasion to discuss this in detail in The *Social Way*. A few words must, however, be said here. I would undoubtedly have preferred to reserve this question, which is entirely social and practical in nature, for the book in which, having dealt with Confucian doctrine, I shall demonstrate the application, to the daily life of earthly man, of the metaphysical principles of the Primordial Tradition and the *Tao*. But I am not quite sure when this arduous labour will be completed, and can therefore see the light of day. I know even less precisely when the formidable ethnic evolution that China is preparing in its ritual colleges and secret societies will burst into the open. That is why, if this evolution is to come first, I must not, for the honour of the science in which I have found my calling, appear to be unaware of it or fail to understand it.

Nothing new – in the strict sense of the word – is being prepared in China, nothing that has not always been in preparation, and which, since the fall of the Ming dynasty, has not been attempted several times. The current movement is merely a repetition, for the same sovereign motives, of previous movements. Only, as these previous movements date back several centuries, and as the white people, still confined to Europe, have not

Although they were not eyewitnesses, they did not attach to it the importance that, *a priori*, they accord to the current movement, even before it had come into being.

Since the violent enthronement of Kangxi, Tradition has been disregarded, and Taoism ignored by the Manchus, who, along with the empire, conquered the throne of the Son of Heaven. The Northern Chinese, a race of powerful suction, have engulfed, assimilated and ultimately annihilated these victorious Manchus within their ethnic identity, just as those strange, flesh-devouring flowers do to the flies that unwisely alight on their petals. But, in absorbing Manchu blood, they have been unable to give it a Chinese mind. And that is why the 'Great Motherland' is not satisfied.

The Southern Chinese, who did not suffer the triumphant invasion, who did not share in the honours of the court or the dynastic dignities, and who have preserved their blood, their sciences and their hopes in their pure form, the Southern Chinese have been working, for three centuries, just as they had worked eight hundred years ago, to restore China to the sons of Han, that is to say, to the pious guardians of Taoism and Tradition.

In the middle of the last century, they almost succeeded: the Taiping Rebellion brought a Chinese emperor to Nanking; and, without British aid, the Manchu dynasty would at that time have vanished in the maelstrom of the Yellow Revolution. The hour was postponed; it is drawing near. It will soon strike. But who among us will hear it?

I do not mean – and let me be clearly understood – that the results of the coming evolution will affect nothing or no one outside China, or even outside the geographical regions where the yellow race lives and is constantly developing; it may be that the powers neighbouring this movement in Asia will feel an unpleasant backlash; it may even be that, across the whole of the Old Continent, certain economic conditions of existence will be altered. But we must be certain that this is not the aim for which today's agitators are preparing the Yellow Revolution.

They intend to carry it out at home, for themselves, and for their descendants. It is not the conquest of the world they have in mind when they disdainfully borrow from European civilisations their methods of violence, their armies and their cannons; if they ever have such a conquest to undertake, they will do so for other purposes and by other means. No; they aim to return home and restore to their entire intellectual heritage the dominant position that is its natural due and which it has lost.

I have neither the right nor the time to dwell here on prophetic considerations, which are extremely natural to deduce for those who have studied and observed. But we may be certain that the triumph of the ethnic movement now taking shape (and which we mistakenly call a national movement) will result in the establishment, on Chinese soil, of the Taoist regime, and in the re-instilling of Taoist discipline into the collective Chinese soul. Without wishing to dwell on this, we shall see it unfold.

And so it is that, very soon and before moving towards a more universal role, the guidance and happiness of a third of humanity will once again—and, we hope, forever—be entrusted to the Tradition that has reigned, that reigns, and that will reign,

until the end of the world as we know it, concerning those intelligent beings whose pious will has determined the excellence of their destiny.

APPENDIX I

On the other side of the wall (*Excerpt*)

Through the deep of night, the sky veiled in the thick darkness of an approaching storm, the shadows, ten paces away, opaque and almost tangible. At a bend in the path, beneath gigantic trees, near a half-dried-up pond, the pagoda looms even darker against the black sky.

Everything seemed lonely and silent; Ong Luu climbed the steps, yellowed and worn by the passage of so many worshippers. His voice rang out beneath the eaves and under the roofs.

"– Are you there, Phap?"

A distant, white voice, almost plaintive, replied in the unsettling darkness through which whispers of mystery drifted:

"I am here, Luu, I pray to the Gods."

Ong Luu advanced slowly, brushing against the stone pedestals, passing through the narrow, long passages carved between the rows of statues, carefully climbing the steps hidden in the shadows that rose tier upon tier to the final altar. The immense pagoda seemed to double in size in the darkness.

In the gloomy twilight, the entire pantheon of the gods of Annam seemed to be watching and living.

On the main altar, which, in the midst of the immense peristyle, concealed the steps leading to the other altars, stood the great Khiu-Lang of Thap-Khiep, a young god of solid gold, in whom lies the secret of the sages, the ultimate manifestation of the absolute, emerging from the half-open generative flower and borne by four Thieu-Tien in prayer, accompanying gods, also covered in gold plates and symbolising the homage of the four worlds: the sensory, the emotional, the intellectual and the mystical. Around him, a golden halo of piled-up clouds encircled him, from which emerged the heads of ten servant genies; and, from the upper cloud, with wings spread and horns upright, soared triumphantly the dragon upon which rides, through time and immensity, the idea of the ineffable Eternal.

This golden mass, a masterpiece crafted by some saint with the fingers of an artist and the brow of a thinker, opened magnificently, for the crowd, the sanctuary of wonders, and for the wise, the temple of mystery.

Around it, the Bo-That, immortalised in the posture of benevolent gods, friends of mankind and guardians of its destiny, symbolised, through their golden faces and hands, the inner enlightenment bestowed upon them by universal knowledge, beyond the texts and outside of gnosis.

And behind them, arranged in a courtyard, the An-Khadiep and Khoa-Tu, gods of physical and intellectual paternity, stood with hands clasped, their faces silver; the Pho-Huc, seated, held in his crossed hands a flower bud and a blossomed flower, an image of imperfect and transmitted knowledge, and of complete knowledge, which study alone can acquire; and, around him, the Om-Thé-Thi, fashioned in his likeness, materialised memories of the pious bonzes, the daring Phap, the solitary Phu-Tuy, the Tong-Sang discoverers of mysteries, who, through their labours, have attained on earth the highest degrees of virtue, power and knowledge.

To the right and left of this first altar, slightly lower down, ten statues of sanctified warriors, clad in yellow robes, represent the Thap-Dien, spirits of dead kings, funerary monuments dedicated to the Thân, the psychic element of departed sovereigns, which still hovers above the lands they once ruled, guardian of good servants, yet changeable, and troubled by the good it might have done but neglected to accomplish; and so the Thap-Dien remain at the gateway to infinity, until the spirit of their successors or the mathematical accumulation of their merits makes up, through the passage of time, for the inadequacy of their earthly deeds.

Faced with their dual theory, Ma-Dien and Ngheu-Dau – whom popular opinion calls malevolent spirits – guard the images from all defilement; a terror to simple souls, one with a horse's head, armed with a sacred spear, the other with a buffalo's head, armed with an iron-tipped mace, they warn seekers of the danger of their quests and halt them on the path that borders on evil, that moral precipice, and madness, that intellectual abyss, hearts and minds quick to be frightened by appearances.

On the same level as the altar supporting the Khiu-Lang of Thap-Khiep stand the two Ho-Phap, colossal statues of the guardians of the threshold, giant watchers of the treasures, one with a gentle, white face, holding a golden orb in his hand, the other, punisher of sacrilege, seated upon a chimera ready to pounce, his face red, his right fist raised, his eye menacing; around them, the benevolent and wise Bo-That stand in rows, their white faces and hands with raised index fingers.

Finally, along the supporting walls of the pagoda, half-carved into the hard stone, embedded forever in the structure whose roofs they seem to lift upon their sturdy shoulders, the eight Kim-Kuong, gods of war, warrior spirits, with bulging muscles, red masks on their faces, and gleaming sabres, menacing with every gesture and their sheer mass, halt the anxious, terrify the faint-hearted, astound the indifferent and, instilling a salutary fear in the hearts of the crowds, render knowledge more inaccessible and scholars more revered.

A great bronze bell, around which the symbolic dragon winds, awaits the call of the faithful and amplifies the sounds from outside within its wonderfully resonant cavities.

Such is the peristyle of Phu-Nhi. Formidable on feast days, it holds the prostrate faithful in awe and impresses the crowd to the point of shouting.

Ong-Luu passed through the hall of motionless deities and, torch in hand, set foot upon the *shadowy steps of mystery*.

Upon large stone cubes, each one rising higher than the one before it, and which resemble altars of sacrifice, stand the most august figures of the primordial cult, arranged so that they may all be taken in at a single glance.

There stands Qua-Haï, the sea-crosser, clad in a single sheet of gold, his hands clasped in prayer towards the earth. There, Ta-Nam-Tao and Hiu-Eac-Dao, gods who bear witness to the birth and death of mankind, seated in their red robes embroidered with gold, their hair and beards white, wearing solemn headdresses, hold in their hands the celestial books, in which all of humanity passes, leaving an individual mark. There, the four Co-Thien, kneeling in their four-coloured robes, personify the four worlds that worship the Universal Being.

There, Ngoc-Quang, the celestial emperor, stands three times the height of a human being above all the other gods, and with his hands, whitened by eternity, counts, by means of as many black plaques suspended from his neck, the human races he sustains and the lives he bestows; there, eighteen Khiu-Lang, symbols of the offerings of the Bo-That who have succeeded one another in life, blackened by the ages and their journeys, are piled upon marble tables; there, Tho-Dia and Thanh-Tong sit, their faces black, spirits of the earth and material forces, the student's book and the traveller's staff in hand, representing matter worshipping the creative act.

And the level rises still further: here is the colossal Daï-Rida, enclosed within a four-metre-high gilded plaque, long-haired and frizzy, god of immanent and ultimately victorious justice, seated with hands clasped in the supreme posture of one who has time, surrounded by two Thê-Tu who, standing, present him with the books inscribed with the deeds of men.

Here is the twelve-armed goddess, the goddess of the depths of the sea, who with her many limbs, symbolising the archetypal signs, offers homage through deeds and thoughts. Here is Ba-Thi-Kinh, the goddess of purity, seated beneath a white halo, a silver fruit in her hand. Here is the nameless god-goddess who presides, once beneath the earth, over magic and divination.

Finally, a two-metre-high plinth catches the eye, and, with their feet at the same height as the preceding icons, here are Tam-Thé and the Celestial Trinity, the triplicity merging into the unity representing direct vision; all four so high that the people below cannot see them and that, above the blooming flowers from which they emerge, they are hidden by the building's multicoloured friezes; thus they personify the mysteries of the invisible, and the crowd, believing them to be the highest manifestation of the great unknown, seeks to pierce the shadow of the vaults and the opacity of the metal, whilst, hidden better than anywhere else, in the very midst of the light, the impenetrable lies exposed to the light of day before their unwitting eyes.

Against the end wall of the pagoda, Thanh-Da, god of battle, stood with his red mask between his two black Tho-Song attendants. There, Thanh-Trang, clad in gold, stretched out his arms to the saints of the future, and beside him, the god of harmony, with a blue body, delighted his spirit with divine chords; all around, the Thap-Ba-La-Han, the second celestial choir, protective spirits of scholars and sages, formed a respectful circle.

There, at last, Thap-Bat-Lang, god of speed, master of the lower realms and of death, clad in red and dark gold, sat in a metal ngaï-diuh, watching with a complacent grin as humanity erected altars to omnipotent negation, to the great obstacle that causes one to stumble on the path of Truth; and at the foot of the monstrous idol, the Phap, dressed, girded and crowned in white, his face lost in an immense beard, was crouching.

Behind him, concealing a secret door leading to the outer enclosure where all the poisonous and medicinal plants of Annam grew, stood the great symbolic pyramid, one of the wonders of the empire, the iconic structure that made the Phu-Nhi pagoda the queen of the pagodas of the North.

It was a quadrangular pyramid, the base of which occupied half the walls, and whose summit was lost in the ornate rafters of the upper roof. On each of its faces was personified, through its attributes and the symbolisation of its essential qualities, one of the four sensible worlds of the external universe. Upon this structure, three hundred and sixty statues were carved directly into the enormous stone, a striking testament to the fervour of faith, the genius of art, and the power of the concept.

On the north face, a tangle of blocks represented the mountains and rugged peaks; there, the ninety cyclopean statues of the spirits of the wild landscape guarded the caves, crossed the rivers, tended herds of elephants and tigers, forged iron and unearthed gold; and in a deep cavern, Nhac-Phu, the god of the mountains, crouched, his knees to his teeth, guarding the central fire, and on his shoulder, balancing the universe.

On the western face, the rushing waves surged one upon another in blue swirls, representing the ever-changing realm of the seas; there, the ninety marine statues of the Water Spirits guided the ships, populated the abysses, played upon the raging waters, and held, at the bottom of the seas, the wrecks entwined in their many arms; and in a cave entirely paved with mother-of-pearl, Thuy-Phu, the god of the waters, raised with a single gesture the raging storms and the fertile floods.

On the southern face, the realm of woods and earth stretched out in shades of green; there the ninety androgynous statues of the Spirits of the Earth built cities, sowed rice, and brought the happiness of peace and abundance everywhere. And Gi-Lac, god of wealth, lying sprawled, plump and joyful in the fertile rice field, smiled upon the efforts of the humble and the faithful.

On the eastern side, finally, white and golden clouds represented the realm of the skies; there, the ninety winged statues of the spirits of space made the sun sparkle, the friendly stars shine, and the tireless worlds orbit in their endless courses; and upon a cloud symbolising the depths of immensity, Te-Tien-Daï-Thanh, god of the Ether, surrounded by the immaculate whiteness of the void, raised his superb brow, haloed by a ray of celestial light.

This incredible structure, this pyramid which encapsulated the materiality of things and the immateriality of ideas, stood as a splendid monument, reaching to the feet of the Eternal One, the adoring ascent of the universality of created beings.

Ong-Luu passed by, familiar with all these things, and spoke softly into the ear of the motionless Phap; after listening and reflecting for a moment, the latter raised his head and gazed with eyes devoid of expression, absorbed in the contemplation of inner thoughts.

– Go then, he said, in the same startling voice that had just welcomed Ong-Luu and made him start; go, pray according to the rites; repeat the incantations often. I shall aid you with my ministry: to your knowledge and power I shall add my knowledge and virtue. I invoke *God* that the *gods* may grant your prayers.

And he fell silent once more, having set down his torch. Ong-Luu, holding scented sticks in his hand, and having written characters on a sheet of amber-coloured silk which he placed around his neck, removed his sandals, returned beneath the portico and, with his arms outstretched towards the East and the West, knelt on his heels, turning as he spoke towards the motionless image of the gods to whom he prayed.

'– Infinite Being whose name no one has ever dared to utter, by your ten thousand attributes I call upon you; by your ten thousand manifestations I invoke you; faithful to the precepts, to the traditional teachings, to the succession of rites, I conjure the light of the four worlds to come at my voice, to take on a radiant form.

"God, dispenser of existence, before you I am like the animal that does not think, and whose actions are guided solely by sensation; yet in the temple dedicated especially to your mysterious power, I implore you by the seven wisdoms corresponding to the seven elements to bestow a little of the light, scattered throughout the worlds, upon things still without life, so that for a moment I may comprehend what has been, is, and will be. Beloved gods, witnesses of life and death, I call upon you, you who bear in your minds our fleeting existences and who shall one day recall to the universal centre the eternal fragment that is Master Luu.

'Father of the wise, O God of Luu, since that sacred day when I knew the Law, for the first time the fault of my heart has darkened the light of my soul; O Than-Trang, I can no longer see—give me your eyes.'

"And you, Thap-Khiep, solitary and unknown God, whom the people take for a ridiculous incarnation, you whose name no profane lip has ever uttered, O Khien, you whom no one has seen or understood, and who with the gesture of your two hands shows the active from above and the passive from below, Strength and Virtue, and who dwells in the midst of the Tao, universal and incomprehensible synthesis, you yourself, adorable and fearsome unknown, I call upon you, intangible centre where all perfections converge in unity, which is the perfection of perfections; behold my word, my offering, my prayer. Judge, grant, promise."

He paused, bowing his head, his gaze lost. Suddenly, the Phap appeared before him, wrapped in his great white robe and his silver beard.

With a long, cold finger, he touched his shoulder:

"'Come,' he said."

Having walked to the sacred place and prostrated themselves there, they fell silent, looking within themselves.

THEN ONG-LUU PRESSED HIS FOREHEAD AGAINST THAT OF THE MOTIONLESS PHAP.

After a few moments, Phap rose and walked out silently…

APPENDIX II

The Sage's Farewell

'… The people of the distant races of the West have declared that all Science is to be envied by all; thus, they have thrown themselves headlong into the whirlwind of notions piled up by all of humanity; in this senseless assault on all the strongholds of the Idea, in this disorderly compilation of all writings and all words, they have lost the sure guide of synthesis. Remaining barely halfway up the mountains they should have climbed, they have not witnessed the panorama that reveals itself in its entirety only to the eyes of the true scholar. They therefore attributed the weakness of their sight to the imperfection of things; where they could see nothing more, they believed there was nothing left to see; and there they set the insurmountable limits of human knowledge.

'With the limited knowledge they possessed, they denied the secrets of complete science. Then, other people from the same countries declared the dissemination of science to be harmful; they compared it to a poison which, when administered by an experienced hand, strengthens the body or stimulates the intellect, whereas, when administered by an unskilled person, it pits the rebellious human elements against one another and destroys the being in a furious disintegration.

'However, little younger brother, no level of Science is harmful, provided it is understood; that is to say, one must not climb the second rung of knowledge until one has firmly established oneself on the first. Almost everything is incomprehensible to man; nothing is unintelligible; that is to say, your ignorance is not attributable to the loftiness of the concepts, but to your own personal inferiority; you must therefore never fear to work or to acquire. What you must fear is not being properly prepared, for one must prepare oneself not only in mind, but also in heart and body.

'If your body takes command in various situations, if its desires are necessities for you, you are not prepared to know. If your heart is not upright and free from all passion, or if you seek in science merely an endorsement of your convictions or a justification for your feelings, or, in a word, anything other than the conquest of the Idea itself, you are not ready to know, for the perverse inclination of your heart will lead you down paths with no way out.

'Know, first of all, that Science is a series of ascending assertions, and that on the day you arrive, through your study, at the negation of a principle or a general law, you will have been mistaken, and you will have to start again after praying to Heaven to forgive your inadequacy.

“Work with a clear and ardent mind, but also with a silent and docile body, and with a humble and straightforward heart. Thus, you will have no deviations to fear: and the little that you perceive will drive you only to healthy curiosity, and not to the foolish denial of the greater whole.

“Whether you write or speak – and you will be compelled to do so by the invincible nature bestowed upon you by your Western ancestors – take great care with the knowledge you are about to impart. Here, it is gentle, passing from my slow voice to your attentive ears and your discreet mind; it has enchanted you, through the long nights of our mild winters, amidst the spirals of smoke, or in the dazzling nights of our summers, when we gazed at the stars without questioning them, for we knew their secrets. But take care that, once spread abroad, it does not become like a vengeful dragon or a malevolent tiger. For, depending on whether it falls into good or evil souls, it will be like the blade of a sword whose flash illuminates, or whose edge spills blood. You are an ambassador laden with dangerous gifts.

‘Be assured, moreover, that for every ten who read, for every one who understands, ten thousand will remain ignorant, and, disdaining the good fruit, will not touch, in fear, the poisonous pulp. – What, then, is the point of creating a work other than your own? And why diminish your intellectual feast with a dish you will offer in vain to coarse appetites?

“Do not forget that every creation is a diminishment of oneself, and that you will be weaker, your ideas having been disseminated, than if you kept them within yourself. I have fulfilled a duty towards you that I would not fulfil towards a crowd without danger to them and to myself…

“But know this well: the knowledge I have imparted to you is nothing compared to my own; my own is nothing compared to that of the Books; and that of the Books is nothing compared to that which Is; it is that alone which, were they able to comprehend it, could deliver your countrymen from their final error. If I foresaw it, however, I would give it to you without hesitation, and without thinking of changing their destinies.

‘The Yijing, our Master, said: “By treading upon the frost of bad habit, the ice of evil and misfortune arises”; yet for centuries now, those in the West have been treading upon that frost, and they have turned it into a wall of ice so thick that the warmth of truth will never melt it.

‘You have burned the temples, ruined the children, scattered the bones of the Ancestors. So did the Mongols of old in the north of the Empire, but that is not your greatest fault… Once, you retreated before the vanguard of one of the Empire’s twenty-two armies[1]. Consider what you would do if it were to take up arms against you in its entirety. But it is not this danger that threatens you…

‘But here is your greatest crime: whilst we have piously preserved it, you have forgotten your origins and your destiny; you do not even know who you are, and your scholars, to your applause, claim you are the sons of apes; when, in

[1] Allusion to the Battle of Bang-Bô, along the Great Wall of China, in the Viceroyalty of Guangxi, during the Tonkin campaign of 1885.

chance, you recall the name of the Absolute, it is only to drag it through the mud of your ignorant contempt. You have extinguished, for the sake of the foolish body, all the lights of the spirit; for the perfection of the workings of your clocks and your machines, you have lost knowledge of the movement of the Universe. And you wander proudly in utter darkness, to such an extent that you—whom I believe to be a mandarin of your race—are blinded by the flickering flame I placed in your hand as if by the sun.

'Behold, man of the cold, how many of you there are and how many of us there are. Without counting the Mongols, the Giaochis, or the Nhetbans, the Chinese alone are twice as numerous in China as the whites in Europe; and indeed there are our brothers in the Indies, on the great islands, and as far as America. The Empire, which has fertile regions but also contains vast deserts, high mountains, and barren scrublands, will soon be unable to contain them or feed them. Where, five hundred years ago, there was but a single man, there are now ten, and not a single grain of rice more to feed them. For many years, they will huddle together, and they will not have enough to eat; and this will go on for so long that neither you, nor I, nor our sons, will see anything else happen.

'But a day will come when they can no longer live like this. Then the younger ones, leaving the rice field to the eldest, will rise and take the tablets of the ancestors; and they will depart without regret, for they will thus have taken their home and the spirit of their race with them. They will be neither a hundred nor a thousand, but ten thousand times ten thousand. They will arrive; they will need neither weapons nor violence; there will be too many of them.

'The immense and ever-growing fertility of the race will drive you into the sea, chase you from your kingdoms, and snatch the last grain of rice from your starving mouths. They will come there in many years to come; sometimes, in my dreams, my lucid mind flies to the things of the future, and I see, I see long lines marching endlessly towards the mists of your country; and I hear, on the paths leading west, the clatter of the sandals of these thousands of men. May our moved hearts salute the mists of time from which they are about to emerge.

'They will arrive; faced with their terrifying numbers, you will have no recourse but to your God, for all strength would be useless; and it is then that your neglect of Heaven and the ignorance of your minds will prove fatal to you, and that your transgressions will rise up to bring about your ruin. Neither your effeminate civilisations, nor your materialistic systems, nor your perverse plastics, nor your sensualised acts will even give you the courage needed to die well. Your bodies, emaciated by self-imposed exhaustion, your souls, weary from the dizziness of your philosophies, your minds, numbed by twenty centuries of denial—all of you will be swept away in the torrent of your vices; and you will vanish before the ancient Race that has kept intact the principle of eternal Wisdom, which blazed before our common ancestors.

"It is our consolation, we humble students who die over the Books before they have revealed all to us, to have foretold and prepared the final victory of the sages, and to have set it forth, in the hope of our children, as the prelude to the rewards due to the faithful servants of the Tao…

"Go then, but be mindful of the worth of your endeavour; never be a populariser; let your teaching be revealed only to a few and remain veiled

to the crowd; make, if you can, followers. Though your path can change nothing of the final Way, take pride in following it. But follow, step by step, without ever stopping, the Mystery; if you were to hesitate for an instant, like a hunted tiger, it would turn upon you and swallow you whole. And, whatever light your mind may gain by turning in upon itself for years, remember that you are nothing compared to other men, who are themselves nothing compared to the truth. And let your prayer then make up for your knowledge.

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One more warning. The world around you is nothing but what your thought makes of it. You have learnt that, in truth, between the Ideal and the Form, there is nothing but a mode of reality. The generation of the ideal concept may attain indefinite perfection; but the work of implementation demeans the worker, and leads only to a disillusioning result. Yet you will be compelled to live in the external world, which is but the detestable reflection of innumerable material aspirations. You yourself will feel enveloped by the discouraging emanations of the Earth, and by them immobilised, diminished, constrained in your endeavour.

'The emanation of a community is at the level of the lowest portion of the collective; you will therefore be drawn by powerful and unforeseen forces towards a mediocre destiny. You will resist them; you will fight them; with the help of our teachings, you will overcome them. But the sum of thought and energy that you represent will, in part, be expended in this struggle; and all that you give today to the Idea – which men sometimes call the Dream – will be diminished by that much. With greater fatigue, you will therefore make less progress, and your slowness will often be the cause of great setbacks.

'Indeed, what will be the consequence? A general decline in your intellect, and, if you are not careful, a descent of all your ideas to a level which, whilst perhaps still lofty, is intellectually inferior: as if, after having seen the Ideas, adorned with divine radiance, stirring nobly within your soul (ideas to which your concept has given, beyond all forms, a being), you were to see them—though still similar in essence to themselves—compelled to play out the same epic turned into a farce, on a lesser stage, and draped in vulgar tinsel. You will never find consolation in this. Every day, your heart will be pierced by such a desecration, and every day you will suffer from the involuntary dishonour inflicted upon you, in spite of yourself, upon the living Spirit by illusory contingency.

'Suppose even—and here I go as far as material impossibility—a solitude where, far from men, or master of the few who might be there, you have nothing left but to overcome the complicit inertia of nature: you will never realise your Dream. Never, with material elements, will you translate the subtle perfection of these concepts, and, even amongst the most fantastically rich imaginings, you will never present to your astonished eyes anything but vulgarised appearances. You will achieve the mediocre, the passable, perhaps the best, but never the good; you will never move from the Comparative to the Affirmative; and you will lose yourself in this pursuit of the impossible. Never will you create, or even simulate, the True with the tangible and the visible: upon encountering the Inaccessible, you

will grieve that you can do nothing in accordance with your thoughts; and, disgusted by things that are but appearances, and by the so-called signs of achievement, which are but chains stretched across the path of the True, you will yearn ardently for other destinies.

'I wish to tell you this: you will yearn for death; for you know that death is the breaker of chains, the destroyer of your original imperfections, of those base needs to see, to taste, to act—needs which alone bind us to the foreign matter that is, nevertheless, our own.'

'You will therefore be tempted. In your long journeys across the parched sands of error, death will seem to you the spring from which to quench your thirst for truth; you will be tempted by it when you sense, within your grasp, in the form of a concentrated sap from a tree or an overwhelming cloud of smoke, the solution to all the problems with which you have tormented your mind.

"In the endless ascent which, under the unceasing will of heaven and, for a time, under your own, your being traverses—an ascent of which you found, at your birth, the earlier progression concentrated in your faculties, your passions and your natural desires – you know full well that death is the passage from one step to another, which you shall climb when the efforts made on the step you are leaving shall merit you an improvement. Now, for us, and therefore for you, this passage—whose forms are unknown, but whose value is certain—this passage cannot and must not be anything other than the greatest desire of your present existence, since it alone gives you the assurance of drawing nearer to the Goal, ever sought, sometimes glimpsed, never conquered. This death, which draws one closer to the Spirit and further from matter, is at once the joy of those of the spirit and the dread of those of the matter. Its coming, at a set hour, is inevitable; its outcome, too, is inevitable. Your merit, then, O you who suffer in the darkness, will be to remain prostrate before the light rather than to face it with your bold eyes. Know that only spirits have eyes without lashes or eyelids, whose clear gaze is not harmed by the sun.

'So long for death, but do not seek it; it will come only when you have earned it; accept the present life as atonement for past mediocrities, born of a limited and now extinguished responsibility, of which you have a dim but constant memory; do not cut short this penance yourself. For if you call upon Death without her coming to you, and then, as an impatient and curious soul, you go towards her, and compel her to part with her treasures to you prematurely—treasures she owes only to a certain measure of effort and merit—you shall enjoy this ill-gotten gain only as a dishonest possessor; and in the afterlife you have brought upon yourself too soon, the gifts that make it a blessing will turn against you, and will themselves be the punishment of their usurper.

'However, take good heed of this: the circumstances of death are no less significant than those of birth. To let chance determine the time and conditions under which we draw near to Heaven is the ultimate sacrilege, matched only by the supreme vileness of letting a woman's weary consent or the nervous excitement of alcohol determine the birth of our children. As the master and responsible author, albeit with limited authority, of all the acts of your earthly life, you must still and above all be master of the last, insofar as it is earthly, and

guide it in the direction in which you have steered your entire life. Shame on the ignorant and the cowards, who entrust their future welfare solely to the guidance of higher beings, and who foolishly offer the inertia of their body, heart and mind as a pleasing gift to the affections of Heaven. In relation to the Universal, the Total Number, which you call God, exists; but for you, man, it exists only within yourself.

'The profound mystery of the reason behind the Ten Thousand Beings reconciles the freedom of your immediate interests with obedience to the Supreme Will. Through your death, you may force a change in your development; but you acquire the right to this compulsion only if you have prepared and arranged the circumstances that must accompany the disintegration of your elements. In a disorderly life, a brief effort would be laughable; amidst unforeseen circumstances, a whole lifetime of learning and virtue would become useless; would you, a man of insight, consider yourself prepared if you were to meet death by chance amidst the drowsiness of sumptuous meals or the company of generous women? Since all acts deserve preparation, this last one—your death—demands it all the more, and the preparation must be all the longer and more subtle as it determines more numerous and far-reaching consequences. You yourself and everything around you, if you wish to die happily, must be perfect. Yet human perfection is a point one may reach, but never remain at. The moment you are perfect, you must die; and you must have calculated the stages of your perfection, so that Death appears at the very end, and crowns it.

"Finally, remember that, like the body, the mind is fragmented and divided; you will attain the splendour of Unity only by gathering these scattered fragments; the benevolent influence of Heaven draws these fragments towards one another; strive to recognise and receive them: thus you will truly live, after having seemed to live…

"... I shall be silent from this point on; to tell you more would be to hastily bring forward the moment when you open your eyes; that is not my role, it is yours alone; on that day, you know where to find the subtle intermediaries that prevent the mind from wavering and the intellect from becoming clouded. The teaching of the Sages goes no further; beyond that, you will be lifted up by the direct vision of the Light.

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'Here is my final advice to you. It would undoubtedly have been better had you remained among us; the banyan trees in the garden were accustomed to your presence; the children smiled at you, the dogs no longer barked as you passed; even the most closed hearts had opened their depths to you; and you had read my people as though they were a familiar book. In the peace of the flamboyant trees and the fountain ever covered in moss, beneath the golden warmth of the setting sun and under the benevolent shade of a pious roof, at the foot of the altar where the Spirit of the Ancestors watches over, you would always have found the meal of knowledge served too lavishly for your hunger. With bodies still, our light and subtle spirits would have led us through human notions, to the gate of the transforming Heaven. Here you would always have found the bowl of rice that defies hunger, the cup of tea that defies thirst, and the fragrant smoke that leads to ecstasy; you would have

You have lived in peace, oblivious even to the names of men and things in the outside world, in such tranquillity that only Death itself would have seemed preferable to you. Can you not? Do you not dare? Let Heaven's will be done. In the storm, remember my counsel; when you are in the mists and in the struggles, remember the garden of knowledge and light which is also the garden of calm and happiness. And if, in the deep slumbers that will ease your weariness, your faithful Spirit brings you back to my threshold, remember that it is always open to the footsteps of a friend.

"The sun is rising; go, my little younger brother. Let nothing frighten you: armed with the Way, you are sacred to matter. Do not be troubled by the abandonment of the multitudes; he who possesses the torch never walks alone. Go in peace; you bear the truth."

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